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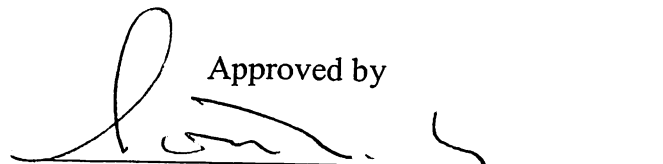
THE WHOLE SHEBANG: A DIRECTORIAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCTION OF RICH ORLOFF'S ONE ACT PRODUCED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI THE 8th and 9th OF MARCH 2006

By
Jennifer Webre

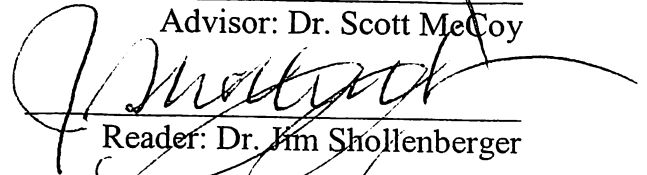
A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell-Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2006

Approved by



Advisor: Dr. Scott McCoy



Reader: Dr. Jim Shollenberger



Reader: Dr. Charles Gates

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Abstract

JENNIFER WEBRE: *The Whole Shebang*: A Directorial Analysis of the Production of Rich Orloff's One Act Produced at The University of Mississippi the 8th and 9th of March 2006
(Under the direction of Dr. Scott McCoy)

The following pages are the account of one directing student's process from auditions to applause to produce a play entitled *The Whole Shebang*. As well as the procedures employed to assemble the final product, the subsequent chapters also explore the relationships between the student actors and their student director; the pitfalls and successes both created and endured by all involved; and the successful play that happened despite it all.

“You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.
And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

“Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labors
and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham,
drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

“Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.”

-Desiderata

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Introduction

It is often said that “the artist is found in his art,” if this is true, and I believe it is, then within the subsequent pages lie much more than an academic account following the opening of a script to the closing of a curtain. Between those bookends is the story of a student fighting the natural entropy that is at the core of any theatrical production- the constant threat of unraveling that the director, the sole overseer of a production, must constantly wrestle for any chance at success.

And we succeeded. Despite the problems with auditions, cast absenteeism, an easel and a fractured ankle the night before we opened; the show went on. And not in the oppressive “break a leg or die trying” kind of way, but in the light-spirited bliss created when seven people are doing their best at something they love to do even if they have to step around a plastered leg to do it.

Also accompanying this work is a DVD of our production of *The Whole Shebang* as well as photographs collected throughout the rehearsal process. I feel it is important for the actual production to be a part of this thesis because although I have written a thousand words, the pictures still say more.

As the first thesis of its kind in the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College I hope the following pages will begin a body of personal records of the artists here at the University of Mississippi, if only so that future students may learn from our mistakes.

Chapter 1: Play Selection

Note to self: May 9, 2003

Never lose the audience. Without them you do not exist.

If there is a definition of “bad theater” it is from the work of playwrights, actors and directors that get so lost within their own thoughts trying to convey their message that they lose the audience. The observers of this self-absorbed theater become captives instead of participants; they are assaulted by, rather than invited to join in the theatrical experience and walk away puzzled instead of enlightened. I think our Oxford audiences would agree—even in my short time in Mississippi I have found that this town will not be force-fed anything, no matter how excellent someone might think it is for them to digest.

My first experience directing was the Isom Center for Women Studies’ 2003 production of Eve Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues*. The production was part of a rape awareness project as well as a fundraiser for the Rape Crisis Services of Lafayette County and eventually raised around \$4,000. Even though I knew the show was for a good cause I was petrified to create flyers and sell ads because every time I said “vagina” someone within earshot would cringe. While selling tickets and baked goods in the Student Union I was approached by an older woman who said she had heard her friends talking about the play on campus with the “v-word” in it and wanted to talk to whoever was responsible for the “filth.” I suddenly understood what the Monologues meant by the need for awareness in the community. After I explained how the play benefited the Services she looked at me hard, saying “there must be a better way to raise money for those poor girls,” and bought a cookie.

Opening night, expecting the worst, I planned to spend the entire play in the safety of the theater lobby. I had no need to fear, however, the few indignant audience members (one of which was an actress' boyfriend) left at intermission. After the show, while eavesdropping on the audience's discussions, I was surprised to hear more discussion on and quotes from the humorous pieces than even the most touching or shocking of the dramatic selections. I was struck with the realization that what caught and held people's attention was comedy.

The comedic selections within the *Monologues*, I think, is why they continue to effectively spread their "Stop the Violence" message across the country. It fascinates me how accepting the public is of discussion on even the most taboo subjects as long as there is a comedic hook. Sitcoms parodying Jesus and organized religion, stand-up routines mocking every religious sect and shows under the guise of "news" bashing anyone in the public eye are on practically every station but PBS with ratings high enough to show that few people are getting offended and proving that comedy is the key to opening minds to new ideas.

The amazing effects of a spoonful of comedy are the same in Oxford—except when it comes to religion. After performing in an improvisational comedy troupe in Oxford for three years I am still astounded that in a bar, no matter how well the show has gone, no matter how rowdy the audience is getting, one on-stage reference to Jesus makes 50 people hold their breath and the performer is dead where he stands.

So why does Oxford hold its breath? I would love to attempt to answer this question but even the most eloquent response would be dismissed as a Catholic from out-of-town venting about a culture she does not understand. Instead, let me explain how I plan to put up a religiously premised and potentially offensive play in Oxford with everyone leaving the theater breathing normally.

The Whole Shebang asks not “What is the meaning of life?” but “Is there a meaning of life at all?” The play touches on questions the answers to which divide us into sects more deeply than politics or even ethnicity. But—it’s funny. My thesis is about seeing if I can get people to explore the outer realms of their convictions. During this process I am asking no one to change his or her mind, but to consider the possibilities.

I found *The Whole Shebang* after remembering a friend of mine performing a selection from it at a high school national forensics tournament. The one line I have never forgotten is Edna’s plea, “Harvey, please, you’ll go to hell” because of its clever simplicity. One day the quote popped in my head and after hunting down and reading the script I thought the characters were enjoyable and created with compassion and that putting up the show without inciting community backlash would be an interesting challenge. Another challenge was dealing with the comedic nature of the play—reaching the audience in a comedy is notoriously harder than in a drama because it seems that what people find funny is very particular (Three Stooges fans vs. readers of Chekhov), whereas what is considered dramatic and moving is practically universal.

My first step was to decide what I wanted to accomplish with the production. To make a memorable “statement” with the play, I could have easily put up a few evolution posters and made “God” a sniveling idiot while having Harvey and Edna sound and act like backwoods rednecks. They could have carried in the Bible or Book of Mormon or maybe both while huge crosses hung from Edna’s neck and ears complementing her and Harvey’s matching “What Would Jesus Do” bracelets and maybe even a “*W still* the president” sticker. However, even so clearly pronounced, my message would have been lost to an offended audience that would have, understandably, closed their ears as they briskly walked out.

I want the audience distracted by nothing; so, although the role is not gender specific, The Student had to be a man. My reasoning was that *who* The Student is is a novel enough concept for the audience. To have a female Student would risk some audience members inwardly debating whether or not God has a gender and whether or not it is appropriate for that gender to be female which is not only a very touchy subject but is also completely beside the point. Likewise, I thought if any of the characters had any sort of southern accent someone would be unnecessarily distracted by the quality of the accent or take the characters personally.

I was also careful to not have anything pointlessly distress the audience. I believe it is an abuse of my power as a director to waste the possibility of a perfectly good theatrical experience for an hour of unfocused audience shock therapy. If I want to make people think, it is not by sending them skittering back into the comfort of their held convictions, clinging on to the security of the familiar and batting away at the storm of distressing ideas around them.

When The Student does make a specific religious reference, for example, “I should’ve never goofed off on the seventh day,” the people most likely to get offended would find nothing wrong past their belief that God would not “goof off.” However, if that is their complaint they probably will not make it through the entire play anyway. In that respect Rich Orloff gives no leeway—the unwavering and rather interesting premise is that the Almighty creator of Earth is the equivalent to a twenty-something grad student. The kind of student that, on Earth, delivers pizza, cannot get a date and probably does not have an omnipotent bone in his body. In the world of the play, God did not rest on the seventh day; he beat the ninth level of “Halo2.” In fact, since Yahweh is a student he is not a benevolent creator focusing his attention and love on each of us. We are not special; Earth is an ant farm, a mere educational experiment, part of the means to an end of which we have no part.

I personally think this idea is ridiculous and lonely, but therein lies my hope for the play. To come to the conclusion that I disagreed with the concept of a creator that eats ramen noodles between classes, I had to, almost despite myself, recognize and recall what I do believe. My hope is that the play will inspire a similar moment of self-reflection within the members of the audience through its seemingly ridiculous concept and that that moment will ultimately lead them to look at the less humorous and often disturbing reality of life, and, despite everything, move forward.

What each individual realizes they have to live for, what exactly each person finds they have faith in, is not important. Most likely, each individual's discovery will be different. However, while they are watching the show and distracted from their bills, exams, and kid's karate lessons, my hope is that our audiences will be reminded to look at the big picture, the whole shebang.

Chapter 2: Production Analysis

Professors A, B and the Dean took their places and froze in the dark so the audience's focus was completely on The Voice's introduction. As the lights came up on the classroom, the professors' costumes explained their characters before the actors spoke a word— Professor A's unsentimental cynicism was epitomized in a black suit, glasses and neat hair and was the perfect antithesis of the romantic Professor B's bright sari, messy bun, and big earrings. The Dean was dressed in a smart red jacket and black pants to establish her as the facilitator and godlike character in this dimension. She delivered her first line while walking back to the desk, not only because the line suggested she had just seen a student out, but so the play opened with energy.

After a few lines establishing the setting as a classroom where students were presenting their theses, The Student stumbled in carrying three stacks of unorganized research (courtesy of the honors college recycle bins), within which, somewhere, was his thesis. His costume was a crooked tie, glasses, and half tucked Hawaiian shirt. Palm trees and the ocean were not what the script called for, but the actor was in love with the idea of wearing pictures of his own creation. The Student's big grin and incessant clinging to his visual aid, a globe, also helped make him a likeable character from the start.

I wanted The Student doomed from the beginning of his presentation. When brainstorming what could go wrong, horror stories from people who hate public speaking came to mind. A common theme was visual aids failing so that the speaker was left with nothing to refer to or stand behind as a barrier between the speaker and audience. I thought the audience could relate to this nightmare experience. The easel collapsing shtick came from my desire to create sympathy for The Student by establishing that this was a man for whom nothing ever goes right.

After The Student moved the broken easel out of the way he clung to his globe and began his defense. The Dean's "I haven't gotten to all of it" line facilitated the explanation to the audience of the play's premise, that Earth was this student's thesis project, while her questioning also led to The Student's first two direct quotes from the bible, "created the heavens and the earth" and "(I think) it's good." The author's careful exposition came to fruition the moment the audience put the given facts together and realized that in the play, defined by the Voice as "a true story," the man in the Hawaiian shirt is the Christian God.

Throughout his entire introductory speech about the Earth as a "self-sustaining, self-evolving matter-based ecosystem," it was important for The Student to sound intelligent and self-assured so there would be a noticeable contrast in the character when the professors began to question the intelligence behind humanity's creation. While assessing the Earth, the Professors and Dean had moments when they showed they had only recently heard of zebras, Shakespeare, snowflakes, cows, water, beer, etc. which the Student created for Earth. These moments of incredulity and fascination reminded the audience that the four beings, although they resembled *Homo sapiens*, were not human.

The difference between these beings and humans clearly established, the three professors proceeded to relentlessly condemn humanity by sighting the species' undeserved domination of the planet, responsibility for global warming, creation of pollution, love of war, and other vices with only weak rebuttals from The Student. After humanity was thoroughly denounced, its representatives in the audience were given a break by the author who then had The Student defend his creation of sex. The discussion of sex also served to lighten the mood before the entrance of humanity's replacement representatives, Harvey and Edna.

Since laughter at someone can come from a feeling of superiority or being shocked by that person, it was important to create within the audience a feeling of superiority over Harvey, Edna, The Student, and even Professor B, when her insight into humanity's failures involved the Marx Brothers. Alternatively, the element of surprise was essential to the effectiveness of lines like "the white cow's burden," and the discussion of the elusive nature of the female orgasm.

For the human's entrance, Harvey was thrown into the room barefoot and clad only in his pajamas followed by Edna in a nightgown and curlers. Their costumes created the same feeling of superiority in the audience that public speakers are encouraged to find by imagining their audience in their underwear. In addition, Harvey and Edna's nightclothes along with The Student's half tucked Hawaiian shirt stood in stark contrast to the well-groomed Dean and Professors, creating an interesting stage picture.

The Student's pride in John and Mary Doe was apparent as he put the humans on display for his professors. His eloquent monologue describing the perfect couple served once again to contrast with his panicked prattle throughout the rest of the play. However, Harvey's line, "We're not them," knocked the eloquence out of The Student as Harvey introduced himself and offered a firm handshake. The Student, mouth agape and mind in shock, gave Harvey a limp hand—the reverse of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel depiction of God and Adam.

When The Student regained his senses he explained to the humans that their presence had nothing to do with the immediate destruction of their planet, but rather with the fact that he was its maker. Immediately and unquestioningly Edna accepted The Student as the God of the Old Testament, going so far as to say "it sounds like him," hopefully referencing the biblical quotes rather than the timbre of The Student's voice. Harvey, however, had trouble contending with the idea that God resembled a guy he use to give wedgies to in gym class and immediately

questioned the value of his own existence within a “nerd’s science fair project.” Realizing the two were bad for his defense of man as a “wondrous creature,” The Student tried to send the humans back to Earth but found his defense was no longer in his hands. The professors, too intrigued to let the humans go, forced The Student and his cradled globe to sit in the corner and silently witness the author’s next rant of social criticism.

The focus of the satiric dialogue between the humans and the professors was on life and society in general. Even though few people’s jobs are as mindless as giving out hundreds of phone numbers to moronic strangers, many people do live in a routine that falls short of the stimulation they originally hoped to find in life. Edna’s experience helped the audience to connect with those feelings.

Having established that connection, the author sardonically bashed technical progress displacing American workers, the failure of unions to defend their constituents, government espionage on average Americans, the problematic use of amphetamines among America’s truckers, and the growing number and permanence of toxic waste dumps.

Within the next beat, paralleling the criticism of humanity at the beginning of the play, was the opportunity for the audience to laugh at themselves with a topic universally understood—sex. Even though “humanity” was no longer the subject of ridicule, Edna did say, “we’re suppose to be representing the entire human race,” followed by Harvey’s opinion that, “women just don’t seem to like [sex] as much as men,” suggesting that although the argument was between the couple, it was for the audience. Harvey and Edna’s entertaining bickering made an interesting transition between the social criticism and the next beat containing one of the play’s messages.

Breaking up Harvey and Edna's growing argument, the Dean asked, "What would you say has been the best moment of your lives?" The audience sensed a moral coming, but instead got Edna's description of the four types of salad she made before Harvey proposed to her.

The Dean's next question, "Why couldn't Harvey purchase the mayonnaise when he went to pick up the six-pack," was actually asking if Edna was not upset that Harvey never helped her with their children, earns no income for the family and apparently did not have the consideration to pick up his own beer on the day he was to propose. However, Edna and Harvey's lack of a response to the question showed that neither felt anything was wrong with their arrangement even though the audience was still mostly clueless as to what Edna saw in him.

Edna encouraged Harvey to tell the professors about his actual best moment rather than letting him lie about their engagement as his favorite moment in life because, not in spite of, the fact that she knew what his favorite moment in life was. For Harvey's story to have its intended impact, Edna had to encourage its telling otherwise the audience's suspicion that Harvey was a one-dimensional bum would have been confirmed and instead of inspirational, his tale of the perfect beer would have been seen as trite and insensitive.

His deceptively simple monologue was actually a lesson in finding contentment within the small moments of life, one of the main messages of the play. Harvey's line, "I'm broke, I'm unemployed and I have lousy reception, but this moment, this moment is perfect," was, within the world of the play, as close to the Christian vision of paradise as Harvey will ever get. The clear message was that humanity must learn to appreciate the beauty and peace in the little things because the only perfection humanity is assured of are the moments of paradise found on Earth.

However, all The Student heard was a story about cold beer. Silently growing more panicked listening to Harvey and Edna's endless descriptions of how exactly his thesis project had gone wrong, The Student finally exploded out of his chair and made one of the most ironic statements of the play, "Why do you insist on giving me human qualities? It's quite a projection." On its surface, this line was a reference to every civilization that has depicted their supreme being according to their ethnicity or labeled their god(s) with a sex and personality. However, the irony was that the actor who played The Student/God had to give the character human qualities because the author gave the character human qualities in the script, as is the nature of theater. The Student's line also brought up an interesting question: If he did not want humanity projecting their image on him, why was that apparent flaw not removed from humanity at its conception? The answer, if it exists, lies in the concept behind two words: "free will."

Dodging culpability for man's errors, The Student argued that he gave humanity free will. Harvey's response was one to which the audience could relate, "That's it, pass the buck...if I really had free will, do you think this is the life I would have free willed?" As to the nature of free will, the play offers no final answer, however both sides make excellent arguments. The Student contended that Harvey could have made better choices for a better life while Harvey asserted that he made the best decisions possible at the time they were made. The characters then started to get belligerent so the Dean stepped in (perhaps so that the author did not have to supply an answer), and took God and man back to their corners.

After she silently observed the tiff and surmised the futility of human existence, Professor A asked the humans, with a hint of academic curiosity, "Why do you go on living?" The question was so frank that it came as a shock to all the humans in the room, including the

audience, and while the actors playing Harvey and Edna acted as if they were thinking, the humans in the audience actually were.

The question is disturbing because so few people have actually tried to define their reasons for living. Most humans do not feel the need to define their drive to live because staying alive by taking the next breath is such a basic instinct— as hard to define as it is to question. The other choice is death and the play suggests that those who chose death are people who find there is nothing left in life for them in which to have faith. Within this idea the play lays the groundwork for its ultimate message.

However, in the moments given between the question and Edna's answer there was little time for the audience to get lost in thought or to reach any personal conclusions as to why they chose to continue their lives on Earth because Edna piped up with an answer; the author's way of reiterating with a wink that it's the little things that make life worth living: "I just lost ten pounds, I'm not going to die now!" The real answer to "Why do you go on living?" is that the couple's relationship with each other made their lives worth living. Harvey and Edna knew they would never change the world. They made peace with that fact and moved on, working together to make the best of their average lives.

When Edna was asked to name three things that made life worth living she listed three seemingly mundane reoccurring moments in her life and although the audience smiled at her simplicity, Edna smiled because she was truly thankful for these moments. Like Harvey's perfect beer, Edna found her "heaven" on Earth where she knew she could find it, on weekends and in the elusive sincere "thank you." By showing that Edna found contented happiness in the ordinary, the audience, who undoubtedly had something more than coupons to look forward to every week, hopefully began looking for the little moments of happiness in their lives too.

Overall, the play is written like a revival, but instead of calling people back to God, *The Whole Shebang* calls the audience to find faith in something and contentment within themselves. Like any revival, in the beginning of the play the audience was welcomed with a smile. They were reminded of life's goodness and possibilities with dialogue that praised Earth's captivating beauty. Then, almost without warning, they were assaulted with criticism after criticism of man's transgressions. All three professors jumped in to drive home the point—humanity is in dire need of reformation.

When Harvey and Edna entered, their presence asked the audience to look at their own lackluster lives and question why they continued living with all of life's disappointments. As the audience members sat questioning their reason for living, Harvey and Edna pushed them a little lower by reminding them that life is full of "misery, pain and injustice." Tired of listening to ridicule of the life she had made peace with and then overhearing Professor A musing why humans go on at all, Edna figured out her reason for living and the main message of the play: "Because things could get better... When push comes to shove, I guess we were designed to have... faith."

Part of the play's charm is its focus on delivering this message to the audience. When the play approaches potentially inflammatory (and therefore distracting) subjects, it makes statements that can be broadly interpreted and raises questions without giving answers. Another important message within the play is that the answers to life's biggest questions (i.e. Why are we here? Is there a God? If so, what is the nature of God? Do we have free will? Is there an afterlife?) are not important. In fact, Edna and Harvey were given the answers to these questions only to discover they were the equivalent to lab rats with mortgage payments. They then had the

choice to either dwell on what they found lacking from their lives or to continue to find joy in their reality. At the play's conclusion, the audience can infer the latter.

In her last lines Edna asked about reincarnation. The Student replied, "I'm sorry, I can't answer that one" and the truth is, neither can the audience. Although it is healthy to ask and consider the big questions, once people accept that they will never know the answers, they can put the questions in the correct perspective, and allow themselves to actively live in the only paradise they are guaranteed.

The Dean understood the concept of perspective and before her exit imparted her wisdom upon The Student saying, "It's only a universe. It'll pass." She was not suggesting he forget the experience, but that he keep it in the perspective that this experience was only one of many and ultimately, like watching the play, changes nothing unless the participant allows it to.

Whether or not the audience is changed by observing the play's satire of society is secondary to the main objective, that is, that the audience takes inventory of their lives. At the last line of the show, after Harvey asked to become an eagle so he may see "the whole shebang," The Student paused before walking out to agree, "That's a very nice desire, Harvey." The Student was alone on stage so the audience could not look for a response in anyone but themselves. Although it is much desired to see the whole picture, the meaning of life, the audience was reminded for the last time that they would never have all the answers. They were left alone in the dark for a moment to put the unanswerable aside and to remember their faith, their reason for living, and to enjoy the moment of peace within them.

Chapter 3: Rehearsal Journal

February 7, 2006- Tuesday, Auditions

No one can say we didn't get the word out. A week before February 7th, the day of the "Night of One Acts" audition, I sent out a department e-mail with the date, time, place, and nature of the auditions and the first round of blue flyers with the same information. We posted 30 flyers around campus and personally asked people to come to the audition. Another round of flyers was put in every theater undergraduate's personal mailbox three days before the audition and a last minute department e-mail was sent out the night before. Jessica, the director of the other one act, and I had decided that since we were looking for completely different things in our actors we should ask for cold readings (a cold reading audition means that actors come in with nothing prepared and read selections from the script by themselves and with other actors auditioning) instead of prepared monologues. This is also easier for me as a novice director because with cold readings I can see the actor and hear his voice reading the exact words of the character I want him for and, if it comes down to it, hear two actors read the same part back-to-back for comparison. Also, since cold reading auditions require no prep time for the actors, these auditions are usually better attended.

The flyers and e-mails said the audition was scheduled for 4:00pm. As is typical in theater, three actors were there by 3:50 and the rest were five to ten minutes late. Dismayed by the miniscule turnout but still hoping for stragglers, I suggested we start at 4:10. While waiting, Jessica and I explained our plots, characters, and what we were looking for in our casts. She was looking for actors who could emote truthfully and I was looking for actors who could say "orgasm" with a straight face. Since we were casting from the same nine, it promised to be an interesting day.

At the time I thought Harvey's relationships with the other characters defined the play, so finding the perfect Harvey was my main casting concern and The Student took a close second. Edna needed to relate well with the actor playing Harvey but to stand on her own without seeming too forceful. Although I had envisioned men playing the Professors and Dean they could be of either sex and the small amount of comedic timing needed could be learned if the actors chosen were not perfect for each role.

When choosing selections from Shebang for the cold readings I wanted to see how each character would stand on their own as well as within the group. The bits of dialogue I chose were for The Student, Harvey and Edna; two scenes that showed each of the Professors' personalities; a scene with all six characters; a scene where both professors are questioning Harvey and Edna; and Harvey's beer monologue.

In the perfect audition, a director gives scripts to a selected group of actors, assigns roles, and the group goes on stage to read. After each group reads the selection, the director then switches out the group and/or selection entirely, replaces individuals or switches roles within the actors on stage to read from the same selection. The switching continues until, not unlike a basketball tournament's elimination rounds, the director sees which actors are best for each role, which actors work together the best and assembles a cast. On a side note: Since in the best actors in the auditions and the actors that have chemistry with each other are not always the same, the character that has a relationship with every other character, in this case, Harvey, should be chosen first and then casting is decided on how well actors relate to him.

In my reality, by 4:10 we had nine actors auditioning for nine roles in two shows. Mathematically it's perfect, but it would be a miracle if everyone fit into a role. I needed six actors- one male to play Harvey and a female for Edna, but the other four roles were ambiguous

as to their sex. Our department, like most programs, has more women than men, so the possibility that we would not have enough men try out was very possible. Jessica's script called for six characters as well- three of which had to be male.

Four males and five females tried out. Three of the nine were immediately discounted by both of us but were never asked to leave because we needed people to read with those we were still considering for roles. Although it would seem that with so few actors it would take less time to hold auditions, auditioning everyone turned out to be much more difficult than expected because Jessica and I both wanted the same actors to read and the actors were constantly going back and forth to each space to read for us. Because *Hello, Out There* is a deep and involved drama and *The Whole Shebang* is a farce with lots of one-liners, the actors had a bit of difficulty going from one audition into the other. Finally, around 6:30 we sent everyone home. The whole process took much longer than expected because Jessica and I had to wait between readings for the other to finish using the actor we wanted to see read.

During my auditions almost every actor had a moment where they mugged (made a face commenting on the situation of the scene). Mugging, while it can be funny at the right moments, especially in slapstick, is not what this script calls for and is really one of my biggest concerns as far as acting choices that need to be immediately stopped. The other one is stereotyping. During the auditions the actors immediately picked stereotypes of a nerd, Ralph Crandon and his wife, and British professors complete with pipes. One of the girls played *The Student* as a valley girl and that had an interesting "Legally Blond" twist to the character that I have to admit I considered, but quickly decided would be too distracting.

What should I do about these stereotypes? Part of me really wants to keep them. If all six characters try to have a rainbow of emotion all the audience will see is the muddled brown in a paintbrush cup.

First Impressions of the Cast

Pep— The first time Pep read for Harvey, Harvey was scared and practically clinging to the girl reading for Edna. Although I feel he is the best choice for Harvey, I am concerned by his intense emotions. I see Harvey as a disgruntled blue collar worker- not angry, but never happy and certainly not wearing his emotions on his sleeve. So although Pep has the body I want for Harvey, his incredibly expressive face shows fear, love, sadness and concern when all I really want is indifference. He blames it on his background in musical theater. Although I have never worked with Pep, I know of his reputation as hard working, and as an excellent character actor. My hopes are that Harvey's face will smooth out after Pep reads the entire script.

Mary Bess—After accepting the role of Edna, Mary Bess wrote me an e-mail thanking me, because, as she said, "I'm not usually cast in the funny roles." Suddenly her audition made so much sense. She had read Edna as a grandmother and forced the lines to the point they weren't funny. I now understand this wasn't because she didn't understand the humor of the piece, but because she was trying too hard. I know Mary Bess as a dedicated actress and she and Pep seem to work well together so I have high hopes for Edna and her relationship with Harvey.

Mandy—I performed in a play with Mandy two years ago. I remember really enjoying working with her but that sometimes her concern for her own well being, (i.e. sleeping in instead of coming to rehearsal, taking a day off because it was the anniversary of her cat's death, and the like) take precedence to the point of creating problems for everyone around her. However, that was two years ago and she has been in many more productions since then. When I called Mandy to ask if she was interested in playing the Dean she immediately expressed how excited she was to work with me again and at that moment I was no longer worried, I knew that Mandy would give me her all.

Lance— I immediately liked Lance. I asked him to read for The Student and watched him fall in love with the character. After that, I found that considering anyone else felt like I was separating two friends. He was the easiest and first casting decision I made.

Kerri— I had never met Kerri before auditions. She is naturally a quiet person, and after asking her to be louder and getting nothing more than a pronounced whisper I have to admit I'm a bit worried. However, her reading was honest and I liked her delivery and enthusiasm. Although the character needs to be less child-like than she read, I think with a bit of work Kerri will be the perfect Professor B.

Paige—The girl I originally cast for Professor A called the day after she was cast saying she decided she didn't have the time. Pep recommended Paige, but I'm a bit concerned not because I don't really know her but that when I called she agreed but sounded very unsure as to if she actually wanted to do this project.

When I showed my directing professor the script he expressed concern about the number of actors *Shebang* required. One act plays in the past produced at Ole Miss have had two to three players. I'm, not sure if there is a set logic to it (i.e. it's simply easier to only work around three people's schedules, there's usually not much rehearsal time between casting and the show so a smaller cast allows for more attention to each actor etc.) but having worked primarily with small casts of 2 or 3 I wanted to see the dynamics within a larger cast.

After surmounting the problem of finding six people that work well together and could build solid relationships with everyone on stage, there is now the problem of scheduling rehearsals at a time that all or at least most of the actors can be there. This is especially important because one of the hardest things to do on stage is to just sit there while other people have the limelight. For almost the entire play five people will be giving stage to one person—some actors never get to where they can do this well. The other problem with scheduling is that most plays do not have all of the characters on stage but for a scene or two. All of my characters are on stage for at least half of the play, so rehearsals and who needs to be at each one will reflect that.

Blocking

Not till auditions did it hit me just how disordered six bodies look on stage and how hard it's going to be to focus them towards the common goal of communicating the story. It's abundantly clear that my primary and most difficult job is to create the clearest focus possible for the audience. I hadn't noticed till I sat down to draw out the blocking, but the script includes no blocking or character notes after the opening adjectives and ages of each character.

Finding places for the characters to move in the opening discussion between The Student, Dean and Professors was especially difficult. *The Whole Shebang* is basically a talking heads

play because it takes place at a thesis defense in a classroom. However, I thought the script would suffer and attention would wane if The Student walked in and the four characters sat down to say clever things about the periodic table of elements followed by a quick nod to emancipation-era feelings of racial dominance amongst American Anglo-Saxons and the superiority of dairy cows because of those pervasive feelings of intolerance and discrimination.

So instead I created a blocking station.

Since there was no traffic in the downstage-left portion of the stage I put a table with a pitcher of water, four glasses, a fish bowl with a two-year-old Beta fish named Stix, and a picture of an iceberg that was quickly removed because it kept falling off the table. This table was blocking gold. When I saw Professor A found she had free time I sent her over to the table to inspect the water there. Flawlessly she then interjected her opinion of the water she was holding and took it with her to inspect the previously mentioned Periodic table. Professor B then left her perch at the desk and made a bee-line for the table, suddenly fascinated with the fish. The water table placed upstage left and charts placed downstage left and right got all four characters moving without the blocking looking contrived.

February 15th- Wednesday, 4-6 blocking rehearsal

At 3:30 I arrived at Isom, room 302, to set up the stage up and to go over my blocking notes once more before I tried to interpret my arrows, circles and chicken scratch to the actors. Pep was going to be late but that was no problem because his entrance is ten minutes into the show. However, Paige couldn't come till 5:00. I planned to catch her up during the run-through after blocking. Not ideal, but the cast could only gather from 4:00-6:00 and I didn't want to wait till 5:00 because I wanted enough time to give blocking and run the 40-minute play once.

We started at 4:15 because Mandy came late, couldn't find her script and needed to make a copy. Usually starting late would have annoyed me, especially when we were already pressed for time, but a question from Mary Bess was keeping me distracted from the minutes passing.

I had just explained that the set would now include a table downstage left with a picture of an iceberg, cow, a real fishbowl with a fake fish and a pitcher of water with four drinking glasses when Mary Bess piped up saying,

“If The Student created water on Earth, how are the professors drinking water in the other dimension?”

Seeing my face, she immediately apologized saying she didn't mean to be rude, but I wasn't offended, I was completely dumbfounded—after all the thought I had put into the set and concept behind the play how could I not have noticed something so blatantly obvious?

“Um, well... Since the humans are created in The Student's image and The Student is whatever type of being the professors are... maybe they drink liquids too, but instead of water we'll use purple Kool-Aid or something... Yeah, I need to figure that one out.”

So much for the façade of the all-knowing director.

In past blocking rehearsals I have given the actors their blocking as they read through the play, interrupting them to say “Wait, you move to the lamp on that line. Continue please” over and over as my circles and arrows dictated. This method communicated the blocking just fine, but I became aware of another technique watching my film acting professor block scenes.

He had the actors sit down while he dictated the blocking. Then they ran through the play to make sure everything worked and stopping only when blocking notes didn’t match up or an actor had a question. This method is not only faster, but since no original blocking is perfect, the errors are obvious and immediately fixed. Also, I found that since the actors knew where they were moving and then had to move, their justification of the blocking looked natural sooner than my usual technique of placing them exactly where I want them to stand. (In later rehearsals while checking sightlines I did have to move the actors specifically where I wanted them so they could be seen or give stage, etc., but the changes were minor and easily adopted by the actors.)

The decision to give the blocking differently was completely impulsive. When I gave everyone their starting positions the actors went to their places and I realized we were missing two actors. Without the two bodies there I wouldn’t be able to see the spatial relationships between all six and I suddenly got very upset thinking I was about to waste an hour. This meant that when I did have all my actors, a run through couldn’t happen till tomorrow, and even that was only going to be the first part of the show. I would have no idea if the blocking worked all the way through till the first time we had a run though, which because of their schedules wouldn’t be till the next week. I looked up to see four very confused people because this whole time they had been reading the script and waiting for me to move them. I told them to stop and sit down. Within fifteen minutes I had given the blocking and could run the play.

I found it extremely freeing to watch the actors move through the blocking instead of keeping my nose buried in my prompt book, waiting to interrupt and tell someone where to move. Using this method I was also able to better focus on the cohesion of the play and focus on bringing out the eventual point.

Marvelous as this new method was, about the time Harvey and Edna threw themselves on stage, the back half of the studio (where I agreed to set the stage after Jess had asked me that morning to change it from the front half of the studio) became very small. I stopped the rehearsal, moved everyone to the original, larger side of the classroom, and finished rehearsal. Jessica was in the building that evening so I went to find her to say for my show to work I needed more space. Her argument was that for her show to work she needed less space. That was an exciting conversation... The moral of this story is to never agree to any major changes without taking time to think how/if they'll affect something important... like the entire show.

Since I've found the above ways to get my eyes away from the script and on the actors where they belong, the following notes are things I discovered during the first run-through. Unfortunately, I have a feeling realizations like this were found on the 2nd or 3rd rehearsal of my previous directing projects.

Kerri isn't comfortable standing on stage without something to do. She even sat down on the ground in the middle of a scene. I was standing stage left, and had to ask Kerri to stand up so I could see if she was blocking Lance and Mandy by standing at the table. To fix this unexpected problem I gave Paige most of Kerri's original blocking. So now Kerri basically gets up, walks, says a line and goes back to her seat where she can listen comfortably. I'll worry about making it look a little less planned later.

Midway through the rehearsal I finally got to meet Paige. As she read I was delighted to hear practically the exact intonations I wanted for her lines. I think she will be the perfect Professor A. Since she missed the blocking notes I had to walk her through as we went, which wasn't a problem, but I think she got annoyed at the attention because when I said her line was directed at Kerri rather than Lance she muttered something snippy about this being the first time she's read the script. I think she's use to being on top of things and being the only one behind seems to bug her. Good. That means she's responsible and I won't have to worry about her at all. Or it could mean she just likes to speak up, which forebodes difficulties for a director. I'll keep the happy thought.

On one page I apparently left out Professor B and the Dean's blocking. Suddenly they appear upstage left in my prompt book and I have no idea how I planned to get them there. I need to figure out when and where they move tonight. I couldn't fix the problem in rehearsal because as it was we ended at 6:10 and ending late can make a director a lot of enemies, especially if it makes her actors late to another rehearsal directed by one of her professors.

Another thing I found is that Mandy is also uncomfortable just "being" on stage. Maybe it is because she doesn't have a character for the Dean yet, but she asked if she could be taking notes throughout the show. Of course the professors and Dean will have legal pads, but I'm suddenly worried about them growing a dependency on taking notes rather than watching the action and am now thinking up ways to choreograph the professors taking notes... perhaps during Harvey and Edna's sex fight they can all be watching him and then look down and write something and look up at her and then write... I just need something to show their extreme interest in another way besides everyone leaning in toward the person talking.

I never thought scheduling a time of day for seven people to gather in one room would be this difficult. I'm competing with four jobs, three other rehearsal schedules, costume shop and crew duties for two shows, one brother's birthday and the occasional doctor appointment. The really exciting part is that the people in charge of my cast's other obligations see no need to stick with the original times given. I handed out the rehearsal schedule that took me two hours to assemble, and within 48 hours it was obsolete. In fact, because of the constant last-minute time changes in their obligations I won't have all six actors in the same room again till next week. So, everyday before I dismiss them we plan the next two day's rehearsal times. Today we scheduled an hour on Thursday, there were too many conflicts on Friday, an early three hours Saturday and a late two hours Sunday. I cannot get annoyed; this is just how it has to be.

February 16th - Thursday, 4:00- First half (before Edna and Harvey's entrance)

My first solution for the floor space problem is to have both casts move the audience during the intermission, well their chairs at least. Our directing professor is worried about moving the lights and cords but we've got at least 12 people to breakdown my set, move things and set up for Jessica's show. I am actually more worried about women leaving purses at their seats and the excitement of moving those purses, jackets and keys. People are hell to plan for.

Mandy said the show might be offered to students in the theater appreciation classes for credit. Even though that means a large and definite audience I am not completely sure if this is a good thing. Last time the department invited the appreciation classes (oh, the irony of that name...) to a show in the Isom studio, half the audience was standing two deep against the walls. Maybe we should have a stack of chairs on the side in case... That many people will also dampen the acoustics. (Kerri won't be heard past the third row!) Not to mention all those cell phones going off and the groups of girls talking in the back... We'll just have to make an announcement about silencing their phones and then knock their socks off!

Rehearsal:

Let them go through it once, saw how much of the blocking they remembered. By looking at the whole picture it was easy to see the large mistakes made—one was too quiet, one should cross earlier to hit his mark, etc. I wrote all this down and gave them notes about the changes at the end of the run-through.

We ran it again but this time I stopped them, trying not to ever do a line reading or to stop with a correction and antidote, but to keep the directions quick so they might not completely lose their rhythms. I like the combination of the two.

With six people on stage I can't help but feel that I'm singling certain actors out while forgetting to watch others. Some actors naturally draw attention to themselves so, in general, if a director is giving a certain actor lots of notes (unless it's "I think you're still missing something here") it means the director is actually watching that actor. However, some actors simply have a quiet presence on stage. These actors almost always get fewer critiques because they are literally getting less attention from the director. And the size of the role doesn't matter—it's completely possible for a minor character on stage for five minutes to steal the show from a main character on the boards an hour and a half if the minor character's energy can't be ignored. As a director, it's my job to make sure the people who need emphasis get it, and I think they are, but it still bothers me that I can't watch and critique everyone each time we run the play.

For now I'm trying to run-through the lines as much as possible (instead of my usual stopping the action, giving notes and running the section again) because the play is all about timing and it takes a while for six individuals to work as a cohesive unit. Their lines are due tomorrow so we can work on character development and the nuances within the lines once there are no scripts in their hands. My hope is that if we run the show straight through now, the next two weeks will be fine tuning rather than "move to the left," "get where we can see you" or even "that line is directed at him, not her" and the other obvious notes I usually end up giving till the first tech rehearsal.

Need to get posters together and in the space so they know what they are looking at. Can we use the dance studio skeleton?

This rehearsal I looked for blocking problems: actors in straight lines, upstaging each other, hiding behind the table, etc. With an even number of actors in pairs for most of the show, I also wanted to make sure there was some asymmetry to keep the blocking interesting. There

are so many things to look out for that I practically have to make checklists just to make sure I have not missed something obvious—like the drinking water problem. I finally decided the second state of H₂O is part of The Student's visual aids, but primarily there to make John and Mary comfortable.

Today, by giving myself a second to think about what I wanted to say I realized the actor had corrected the problem before I could speak. This is why I need to just sit and watch, so I don't taint the actors' thoughts by imposing my own.

Need to get them legal pads so Mandy and Kerri feel more comfortable walking and standing still.

Paige offered for us to use her Beta today on the water table. Having the fake fish up front ruined the reality of the play, and my worries that a real fish swimming in circles would distract are no longer a problem because Beta's don't move much! Just in case though, I'll make the note tomorrow that if the fish does jump out or something, anything, else goes ridiculously wrong, The Student or Dean needs to handle it because they are in charge of the classroom and presentation. Does this count as micromanaging or just covering myself?

February 18th-- Saturday, Rehearsal 3-6pm

Lance and Kerri are sick and the other four are trying out for the Oxford Shakespeare Festival later today so instead of having someone read Lance and Kerri's lines I canceled rehearsal so the cast could prepare for auditions. Odd that no one requested the day off. Today's three hours were supposed to be catching up from the three out of five rehearsals canceled last week. I'm not nervous... yet.

I called everyone, told them rehearsal was tomorrow from 6-8pm and that their lines had to be memorized. I'm fully expecting everyone to still need their script for most of the rehearsal, but if I act disappointed in them tomorrow they'll have the lines by Monday. The first rehearsal off-book is always the most tedious and frustrating because none of the actors are ever off book. I'm not sure if this is a college thing or if it's the same with actors everywhere, but even though I know what's coming, it's annoying to have to plan for people to disappoint you.

Tomorrow discuss what Mary Bess and Pep need to bring for costumes and set a date for everyone to bring their costumes in.

Dress rehearsals are usually scheduled as the rehearsal before the first technical rehearsal, but usually the costumes have a single designer. Since I'm depending on the actor's closets to make their costumes and am the only one over-looking that everything goes together, I'd rather know about a problem earlier rather than later.

February 19th—Sunday, 4-7pm (rescheduled from 6-8pm last minute)

Before rehearsal Pep and I talked about whether or not Harvey and Edna were suppose to be from Ohio. The cast joined in but was split on the interpretation so the second time we ran though it I told Mary Bess and Pep to play Edna and Harvey with Standard American accents. Without the accents I found moments when I didn't care what was going on, the play had lost a sense of fun, the energy was no longer there and really, they just sounded too smart. Pep and Mary Bess agreed, but the best thing that happened was that both Mary Bess and Pep said they found things without the accents that they didn't know were there! Yippee for accidental discovery!

The original blocking for Harvey and Edna's entrance had them outside the glass studio door that I was going to paper. Today I decided I couldn't hear them and so we're using the curtains inside the studio for the classroom door now.

Stepping back to let the actors do their job has afforded me the time to see the little things that are really why the director exists. Today's little thing was moving Prof B out of Prof A's way so that the left side of the audience could see both of them. I hate thrust stages. Especially in small spaces where my actors are constantly worried about putting their backsides in some poor audience member's face.

I've talked briefly about giving some time to let the audience laugh and respond but I haven't told them "wait two seconds for the laugh to die down after that line." I've seen plays and heard horror stories where the anticipated laugh never came and the actors were visibly disappointed. I know some of my actors have the natural ability to feel the crowd and so I think once we have Jessica's troupe as the audience at the tech rehearsals I'll address any problems they have with holding for the audience.

Lance suggested having pictures of a mushroom cloud and sex organs to reference for his line “It is psychologically impossible to detonate a nuclear devise if you’ve just had a satisfying intimate experience.” This is where it gets tricky. Since I got the script I have found quirky things to put in that I really think could be funny, but... in another kind of funny than the play was written. That joke, for example, would be really cheap— but someone will laugh. So, do we put sex organs on stage like the entire cast has suggested at least once, or do we go for a higher comedic calling? The pictures falling off the walls, the easel falling apart, the globe breaking into pieces, the skeleton’s arm falling off and The Student taking prat falls... I just need to think about all this.

I’m worried about volume for all of them. And focus--- very worried about everyone getting focus when they need it. And that a few of them haven’t caught the meaning behind what they are saying. I have not said anything about lines yet, hoping the ones who are lost with their characters will find their way, but if by next rehearsal they still haven’t figured their lines out I need to just say “that’s a biblical reference” or whatever other tug in the right direction they need. The ones who are getting the jokes are delivering them as if we should hear a rim shot after they speak. The humor in the play is more subtle than that, and I think that’s part of the play’s charm. I just need to tell them, in general, what I’m looking for again.

Next rehearsal take some time to specifically practice getting/giving focus for the Professors/Dean and humans/Student huddle bit toward the end: Although I don’t want anyone frozen while the other huddle has focus, they need to keep their heads and arms still till they begin talking, then a large movement and burst of voice to pull focus from one group to the other. Right now it’s hard to know where to look, even while characters are speaking because everyone is pulling focus by moving.

February 20th—Monday, Didn't start till.... Blech!

Today's rehearsal was supposed to be from 4-7. Let me preface this entry by saying that we have had to reschedule every rehearsal so far and at half of them I have had to read someone's lines because even at the new time someone couldn't make it. Those rehearsals we have had all started around ten past because one of my actors is always late.

At 4:00 today only Lance showed up. As he walked in Kerri called him. Apparently she had been waiting at The Student health center for two hours, was just seen, and was now waiting on a prescription. I called Pep, Paige, Mandy and Mary Bess but no one picked up their phones.

At 4:01, I received a text message from Mandy saying she was on her way.

At 4:08, Pep ran in to say he was in a costume department meeting that was unexpectedly rescheduled from this coming Friday to 4:00 today and that they should be done around 4:30.

This is the last day I'm nice.

Let me be clear that before today I have not, in any way, expressed anger or frustration towards my actors. After my difficulties getting a full cast I am deeply in love with my volunteers. Rehearsals have been rescheduled with a smile and late performers just take over their lines from me with little or no reproach. Mandy is the only one who has consistently come in late and at the time I was only slightly annoyed with her. So it came as a bit of a shock to realize almost the entire cast is afraid I am angry at them. I'm not an ancient god of destruction, they are all volunteers and the scholastic repercussions for anyone walking out are nil so I am lost as to where this fear came from.

I already knew this about Mandy. At the first rehearsal she was five minutes late but we had not started yet. I was waiting for Lance when she walked in and said "Jenn, I know you're

not happy with me but I don't have my script and need to copy someone's." I was far from mad and even asked if she needed money to make the copies.

Yesterday during rehearsal I told Pep I wanted to talk to him after we were done. I had wanted to work on Harvey's voice a bit and to say that Pep was still commenting on the scenes with his musical-theater trained face. When I approached him after rehearsal he immediately put his tail between his legs and apologized saying he had not worked on the character yet but would bring Harvey in tomorrow. I was in shock at this humble honesty and all that came out was "thank you, I can't wait to see him."

Now today, while Lance and I were waiting on everyone he told me Kerri had called him from the health center instead of me because she was afraid I would be mad at her for being late! I was dumbstruck. I have personally waited in that plagued dungeon for hours and I know it's not her fault. Not only is Kerri one of my favorite people but I'm also thrilled to find she's not contagious after hugging her yesterday. I offered to bring Lance soup when he was sick and canceled rehearsal to make everyone's auditions easier. I have never cared or been so nice to a cast! What have I done to these people to have them petrified I might explode on them?

At 4:15 Paige and Mary Bess came in with food saying this was the only time they could eat and dug in. At that moment I looked around and realized the three that were there cannot do any part of the play without at least one other character and suddenly I'm not happy. Whereas before I was sitting on the floor with Lance I am now sitting in a desk silently fuming that this rehearsal too, after all the others I've canceled, is not going to happen. We have two weeks left, we've had three rehearsals, I've seen the whole play run through only once. There is nothing that gives me hope the next twelve days aren't going to be just like this. Instead of dismissing

them in frustration I keep hold of my right to rehearse and believe, even if for one hour, we will rehearse today. Kerri is on her way, Pep has 5 minutes and Mandy is coming.

At 4:29 Mandy texts me saying “Not gonna be able to make it Jenn. I’m sorry. Will call later tonight to explain.” It was then I yelled. If before they thought they had a reason to fear me... I immediately regretted yelling, it was immature but I never apologized. No one has their lines at all memorized or their blocking down, the only time I have seen Mandy was at the read through and she came for the first scene once after that. My stomach is churning and I want to give a lecture involving the words “commitment,” “You-knew-what-was-involved,” and “the-real-world;” but not to these three. The food thing is alright because if I had said “let’s start,” the girls would have dropped their burritos and rehearsed without question, besides, walking in ten minutes late is nothing compared to completely ruining a three hour rehearsal.

I was about to give up and reschedule, in fact, I was sitting there fretting about scheduling a rehearsal for 10:00-11:00 that night when Pep walked in at 4:43 and Kerri crawled in, looking very plague-ish, at 4:56. I could have kissed them. Paige became my stage manager and read for Mandy and we were off.

Rehearsal starts!

Lance (Student) isn't looking toward stage left at all, even when there is a professor there. I told him there was a power point on the wall, gave him an imaginary clicker- problem solved. Even after we got rid of that idea, he was still using the space.

Every time Paige crossed to the water glasses she scurried across the stage as if she hoped we couldn't see her. I stopped her mid-scurry and asked why she was crossing then, (looking for her to give me her justification) and she said “I have no idea.” After talking about it for a bit I finally realized that she didn't understand why Prof. A would cross for a drink of water. In my

thinking Prof A crossed to inspect the water and drinking it- which didn't have to happen even after she poured a glass- was an afterthought that occurred once she got there. I also said that it might not be water and suddenly she had no problem crossing. Is this cross going to be a problem when the liquid is labeled "water?"

I was thinking about my casting auditions and I realized how wrong I was thinking that Harvey was the character that defined the entire play's relationships. It is obviously The Student (and I think it was so obvious that I second guessed myself); luckily I don't think my misconception messed any of the relationships up.

Kerri was blocking the sight lines so I had her move closer to Mandy and Lance. Although, they're in a line now...

What if I took everyone, especially Lance, to a defense so they could see how one runs?

Easel needs to be almost center stage.

Need to hang posters and pictures up for them.

February 21st-- Tuesday, 10-11 pm rehearsal

After rehearsal yesterday I asked the cast what they thought about a 10pm rehearsal tonight. They said they needed it. I was worried about everyone coming but since tonight Paige, Lance, Pep and Mary Bess all are backstage while Mandy is in the Dance Company show, they were all 10 feet away from the rehearsal studio and there were no problems.

Late as it was, today the show really started to come together. Even though everyone's lines in the last quarter of the play were slow in coming, for the first time I am confident that failure is not an option and the play is not going to fall apart. Jessica's players are expected to be off book Monday. Lance is about 99% off book, Paige is 90% off, Pep is too, Mandy might be 30% and Kerri is about 70% but keeps her script on the desk in the piles of paper because, I think, she's afraid to call line. When the script is kept as a crutch I find it can actually slow the memorizing process down. Next rehearsal I'll be on book for them but by Saturday they will be expected to not call for line.

With everyone more comfortable with their lines I am starting to see bigger character choices. Today Paige asked if I noticed how she was no longer being a complete bitch to The Student and instead was being more of a devil's advocate with a soft spot for him because secretly he was her favorite student. I told her I loved the depth, and understand her desire for it, but with five other "nice" characters on stage I needed the unblinking cynicism more than to see her dynamics so for her to keep her story, but still be as hard on him.

There needs to be a few extremes on stage to balance the whole thing. The Student needs more energy than anyone to counter the Dean's calm. Professor A's reserved nature balances Professor B's scatterbrained demeanor and Harvey and Edna take care of themselves. The most

important thing about having six people on stage was for them to work like a collective group and not having their personalities repeat is part of that.

Mary Bess has Edna down a bit more everyday. Harvey is finally getting less emotional. Prof. B has stopped whispering her lines. Everyone is finally consistently turning out to the audience and the timing of the lines is getting faster and better overall. There is starting to be a real flow to the dialogue. Although, Lance is still is not using his entire body, I think we need to schedule a few minutes before or after a rehearsal to work on it.

When Mary Bess delivered her “faith” speech I applauded I was so excited! I couldn’t help it—she finally got it right!

Questioning the importance of a back story— Edna and Harvey are not from Ohio, in my play they’re really from somewhere near Brooklyn. For some reason I was imposing my idea that they lived next to John and Mary, but what if they took a vacation to housesit... can that explain the accents? Is the fact that I’ve really been thinking about this a waste of time or does everything need a back story? Will the audience think twice about the accents or is it just me? Pep and Mary Bess said they were wondering, but that they liked the accents they had so much they didn’t want to question why they had them for fear of me making them do Standard American again.

Professor A’s line “Those are the two legged creatures with the smelly armpits,” is wholly unjustifiable and, in my opinion, absolutely wrong for the character. Understandably, Paige always looks awkward saying it. Then again, can anyone look sophisticated saying “armpit?” Today she changed “armpits” to “underarms” but I still think such a crude reference is out of place for Professor A.

Lance needs to try to defend the Ice Age much harder, and then give up for that line to work- work on it with him soon.

I'm worried the end is too sappy... it was written like that, I know, I just need some time to try it a few different ways and stick with the least bleeding heart way... I can't help but feel that the ending is out of place with the rest of the script and I've felt that way from the first time I read it but still have no idea what to do.

February 22nd--- Wednesday, before rehearsal 4-6

Talked to one of my professors about my actors consistently coming late, he said I should be tougher on them or get rid of an actor... thought about it, thinking about it... It was so hard to get six actors in the first place and part of it is that it's just hard to get respect as a student director and the other part is that my actors are just really busy. As much as it bothers me they don't have their lines down, are always late and keep interrupting mid rehearsal to tell stories, they seem to be and have told me they are having a really good time, and really, I'd rather that be true than everyone on time but hating being there. Besides, who else can I find?

Harvey, Edna and The Student established a relationship today! I really saw them click and Harvey and The Student's argument is definitely the energetic climax now, and as long as Pep doesn't start full out yelling again I think we're pretty good.

The couple's relationship is especially difficult to direct because with lines that sound like their lives are constant bickering, Harvey and Edna are a long time married couple who, in the end, are happy together and with their lives. I wanted Edna religious enough to be in awe of The Student while simple enough to still revere him after learning his true nature. Her innocence and vibrancy sit right next to her polar opposite, Harvey, a tactless blue collar worker who, despite his petulant nature, still cares for his wife and family... which is why Pep has got to stop taking his anger out on Mary Bess who keeps breaking character to yell, "I Didn't Do Anything to You!"

We have got to work on the opening lines. The first six lines between the Professors and the Dean are really flat and if anything they need to start off the play with as much energy as we can cram into them. I think it's because it's always Paige usually must read Mandy's lines and so is talking to herself and Kerri. In addition, when Mandy can make it, she's so behind on the

changes that we can't run the opening without stopping. I'm starting to see a real difference in the other five's performances and hers. It has nothing to do with talent, but with being there. Mandy looks lost on stage, still has her script and flinches as if I'm going to yell at her every time I talk with her. I think that reprimanding her is not the solution because she knows what she's doing wrong and actually fussing at her will make her less inclined to come to the rehearsals she can come to.

Today I gave Lance his globe. Originally I thought the globe would fall apart or just sit on the desk but since I gave it to him he has not let go of it. I love it. I have big plans for the globe, namely he's going to hold it close like a security blanket when he gets worried and throw it around lightly when he's showing off. With something occupying his hands he is involving his head and legs more in the acting. Another happy accident—this is beautiful!

February 25th -- Saturday, 9-11am rehearsal

I brought milk, orange juice and coffee, Paige brought donuts and it was a great rehearsal, however, I don't think I'll have rehearsal this early again because it took so long for them to wake up and even longer for some to shake their hangovers off... Mandy said she couldn't come because she was teaching a class at 10. This wouldn't have been a problem (Paige has gotten really good at reading her lines) however, Kerri said a week ago that she couldn't be here this weekend and Thursday she asked if it was still okay and I said no problem because she has not missed a rehearsal yet and at the time she was the only one not going to be here. Then Mandy told me Friday about her class Saturday. Paige is looking more schizophrenic by the day, responding to her own questions, trying to be bitchy Prof. A then the motherly Dean. It's quite interesting to watch, but I hate that she has to play two people constantly. However, if she wasn't reading for Mandy I couldn't watch everyone and I think that would hurt the play more.

We mainly worked the relationships between The Student, Harvey and Edna at the end of the play and ran the blocking for the professor's exit, but had to repeatedly run the last beat because Pep would not stop delivering his eagle line to the ceiling. Then we tried several different ways to deliver and stage Lance's last line, deciding finally on the least cheesy way for him to deliver it. After rehearsal Lance and I were going to work on his bit with the easel but the easel broke and we took it as a sign to move on. Instead we worked on his physicality in his fights with Harvey and Professor A and with the globe.

It is very obvious Pep had finally gotten to spend time on Harvey because today he wasn't angry towards Edna. During the last two rehearsals Pep has found real frustration within Harvey and it works, until he takes it out on his wife. Then Mary Bess starts feeling hurt and yells back at him, or, like Wednesday, threatens to slap him. I then have to stop rehearsal and

ask Pep, one more time, why he thinks that line should be delivered to his sweet little wife? Pep apologizes, Mary Bess calms down and we continue.

Lance is still double taking at his line, “it worked great in test cases,” and between the easel and his sex speech he’s wiggling and falling all over himself. His movements have to be precise to look good at these parts and I keep trying to tell him less is more but I must not be conveying it clearly. After I tried to explain what I wanted with the precise movements, what movements he had corrected were suddenly gone and he was completely stiff again.

February 26th-- Sunday 5-7pm rehearsal

Today I was a bad director. I woke up with a fever and sinus infection but wasn't about to cancel rehearsal. As much as I feigned feeling well, I didn't have the energy to control them, but the real problem was controlling myself and I'm surprised that we even got 50 minutes of rehearsal in two hours.

I've figured out how to deal with the lateness and called everyone 10 minutes before rehearsal started. It worked. Mandy thought rehearsal was 7:00-9:00 instead of 5:00-7:00 and since I called her she wasn't late. I also found out that Pep had started driving back to Oxford from Meridian around 4:30 instead of 1:00 saying he had a flat or some other excuse, so he was a no show; I called Mary Bess and told her not to come.

Costumes were due today. Kerri said her inspiration was the divination professor in Happy Potter and it's a little Indian, but once she took the dot off her forehead the costume was perfect. Mandy brought a professional looking blue dress but I think she needs to be in a pants suit, or at least wearing a jacket. Paige had completely forgotten but promised to find something soon.

We were going to run through the first bit without stopping, but there were too many problems. The beginning still seems really contrived, just like the end, but the end is my and the script's fault whereas to fix the beginning the actors just need more energy.

Back to my being a bad director: For starters, I apologized for insignificant things like misplacing my pencil and not being able to interpret my notes at the end of a run. It wasn't till after rehearsal when I got in my car and realized I asked their forgiveness for a pencil that all this really hit me and suddenly the day made so much more sense.

Even though I move a lot during every rehearsal, it's from chair to chair, watching the show from different angles to check sightlines and volume. Today I wanted Kerri to pick up the fish and then walk over to Lance. For some reason I couldn't articulate it clearly enough and finally, annoyed with myself, I walked on stage and showed Kerri what I wanted her to do. I realized while I was standing there holding the fishbowl how ridiculous I looked, and on top of that, the actors were uneasy with the director on stage.

My next sin was that my inner monologue came out a bit more than I would have liked it, imposing my ideas for motivation on my actors rather than letting them discover it for themselves. I thought I was done doing that! Letting the actors do their job is one of the things I was really trying to work on during these rehearsals and today I couldn't control my urge to play puppeteer instead of overseer.

I was not the only one to realize I was off my game, as the following little divergences illustrate.

It all started with a cross. For the past three rehearsals Paige had begun crossing to the water table and then turning almost 180 degrees to her right so 2/3 instead of 1/3 of the audience could see her deliver her next line. It looked awkward. Today it seemed she was no longer working on the turn and had decided it worked, so I stopped the run and told her it didn't work and to do something else for her line at the table. She immediately made fun of that statement, basically saying she was clueless as to what I wanted her to do now and that she hated when directors "did that," meaning leaving the blocking to the actors and just saying vaguely "something needs to change here." I told her what I wanted her to do instead and that's when she told me my idea was a bad one. As a compromise I had her try a few different positions to delivering to see what would work (which made her even more aggravated) and finally she

stopped and said she'd rather work on it that night. and I continued with rehearsal. I, feeling totally incompetent, continued with rehearsal. I still want the actors to find their own motivations, so when her idea for the cross didn't work and neither did mine I began wondering if I should have said anything at all. There is a way to fix this—I'm going to think about it tonight too.

The next incident began with something just as seemingly simple. Today I moved the water table back from up center to downstage left and realized the pictures could not be seen by anyone in the stage left audience. Consequently, when Paige crossed and picked up the picture of the iceberg to ask The Student about the ice age, half the audience would have had no idea what the picture she was referring to was. I told Paige to make sure the audience could see the picture. Her reply was that she was sure the audience wouldn't "think it was a picture of a wiener dog" and that people don't usually wave around pictures. I said I never asked for a wave, and to humor me by showing the audience the picture. Suddenly she says "I guess I could be reading something on the back of it." In that second she found a way to justify my direction that a moment before she thought was laughable. Since then, when she crosses she picks up the picture, looks at the back a bit and then delivers her line. In no way is she taking stage or looks like she's waving a picture around. To her credit she justified the action I gave her; to my dismay she had to question my direction in front of everyone to get there.

I can empathize with her feelings. As an actor still, it's very hard not to speak up when I see something I think is wrong in rehearsals. Paige is also very intelligent with several gluts of time to sit around and watch the action so she has plenty of time to discover flaws. However, just as I have to trust the actors, the actors need to trust me when I give them direction. For my

part that means I need to be trustworthy with their time and talent which, honestly, today I was not.

We got through the second run of the first half of the show with only two calls for lines and no other mishaps. The fact that they are off book really gets me excited. Granted, I told them the lines were due by last Monday... but there are worse things... like if today was next week.

The worst mistake I made and the one time I really felt like I was totally out of line was at the end of this rehearsal. I was giving notes and in an effort to explain the working relationships I was looking for between the three professors, compared Professor A, B and the Dean to the teachers of the university theater studio classes. Suddenly Kerri, Paige and Mandy, three pupils of the team teaching method I referenced, understood what I was looking for and the cast started making jokes about who was which teacher. The last notes of each rehearsal have become our time to talk and joke about the play but for some reason today I did not expect a reaction to this note and I practically yelled at them to stop talking so I could finish the notes. After I dismissed everyone I got in my car and thought about the day. I had let myself stand in the way of progress; it was a bad habit binge and a reminder that I'm still a rookie.

February 27th—Monday, 6-7:30pm and February 28th--Tuesday, 6-7:30pm

After Sunday's personal catastrophe I decided the only solution was to consciously make myself go back to listening and to no longer abuse my power as the one in charge by not thinking before I speak.

Today I finally decided pictures of cows, feet or even the highly recommended sex organs and mushroom cloud are superfluous. The professors need to pick up a piece of paper where the pictures are referenced but since the actors describe exactly what they are looking at, if the audience can't see the pictures they won't feel like they are missing anything. I still feel this is completely different to the picture of the iceberg, which is not described but it is referenced so the audience needs to see she's not holding up a picture of the ice age, or a wiener dog.

Kerri as Professor B is so quiet and laid-back I've been worried about her character holding interest since the beginning. There is a difference between a spaced out character and the actor not paying attention and consequently spacing out—I was afraid Kerri was the latter. I have no idea what inspired her, but today Professor B had more energy than ever. Kerri even looked like she wanted to get out of her chair behind the desk, whereas before today her chair had always seemed like a safe place for Kerri onstage. It's especially easy to see when an actor wants to get up from sitting down and today she was practically bouncing out of her chair. I told her to move and the first run she hid, standing, behind the table. However, after I asked her to cross and then to put down her notepad and she was marvelous. Kerri moved with energy and when the other actors started laughing at her lines she was unnerved at first, but then got noticeably more comfortable each time she spoke. I'm so excited she's found her character! Having another strong character fills in a hole in the play I had not idea was so big till it was filled.

I told Lance to try different nerds today and I liked what I saw. The Professor A and Student argument was electric. The energy was finally there and they worked so well off of each other that I practically applauded after they were done! I also made sure to congratulate them and to tell everyone we are finally on our way to the energy levels needed throughout the show.

March 1st – Wednesday, 6:30-7:30

We went through the entire play once with everyone here-- Finally! I was feeling better so there were many clear notes to give.

The audience needs to relate to and care about these characters so today I watched specifically to make sure the actors had real drives rather than just playing stereotypes. The play is really coming together now that Lance is starting to truly panic that his thesis might fail because Harvey and Edna aren't John and Mary. He's no longer stiff and he's using his entire body to react. His posture, movement and voice are unsure now, I love the contrast with the other characters and his awkwardness makes him an even more lovable character! With the new Student, suddenly the professors are antagonistic instead of just curious. Harvey and Edna, are now more than just a delight to watch—they're torturing The Student and the stage has a wonderful balance of three happy, interested people in contrast with The Student's look of panic, Professor A's cynical stare and Harvey's scowl.

Mandy also found her place today. The Dean is there to take care of the bumbling Student and play referee. For the first time she seemed to belong on stage with the others instead of just catching up with the play. Her character is more of a facilitator than one that makes a satiric statement like the other five. And although it took awhile for Mandy to find her purpose, the Dean now herds the others, especially The Student, toward the final point of the play.

We changed the side for the professors' huddle from upstage right to upstage left where there was actually room for them to huddle. I keep wondering how I didn't see that before.

Today when Kerri said the Marx Brother's line everyone turned to her in unison—it was the perfect take! And then she forgot the "s" on "white cow's burden" again. How does she still not get that joke?

The three Professors have begun drawing pictures and writing notes to each other on their legal pads, with the effect of completely removing themselves from the scene. I had wondered why they all seemed to be staring into their notepads constantly... I had to stop and explain that if they don't look up to watch the action the audience will want to know what is it they're looking at instead of what's going on but instead of taking the pencils away thought it best they police themselves- amazing how much better the play got when everyone that was on stage was actually on stage.

I told Mary Bess to find a mimicking voice for Edna's impression of Mary Doe and asked everyone to try finding the different beats and levels in their lines. Especially Pep. He's delivering all of Harvey's lines at the same level except when he gets really angry. I suppose he's too worried that he'll become too animated, however, there needs to be a big change when Harvey decides The Student "isn't so bad" and another when he shows tenderness toward Edna.

March 2nd— Thursday, 6-7 pm

We started and the cast was dead from the start. I stopped the action and they started to apologize, but these things happen, so I said let's try something different. We started back at the top, running the lines and blocking as fast as they could to help with lines and pacing and then I dismissed them. I think they're getting tired but they haven't reached their best yet—it can't be downhill from here! What to do... maybe a break will help.

After seeing the six shuffle out I thought about how it is I've seen the two halves of this play around 30 times and can still watch without gouging my eyes out. It's focusing on the changes that need to be made, worrying about missing the little things, imagining all the other possibilities and realizing that for this time, place, and actor I have the best blocking I can see. Then the panic sets in that the 60 or so people who are going to see the play will easily see better blocking and that will distract them from the play and it's message and no one will laugh and my actors will be completely thrown off and forget their lines and everyone will think it's because I'm a bad director. Geez, I'm insecure...

I invited the cast to meet me for lunch 12:00 Saturday before rehearsal at 2:00 to ask them a few questions about what they see as the message behind the play etc., to see if I've communicated my ideas clearly. Everyone is excited about coming and the fact that Mary Bess and Mandy were bummed about not being able to come makes me think everyone is really having a good time together.

March 4th—Saturday, 12:00-6:30pm

With tape recorder in hand I went to lunch expecting the worst. Thinking I wouldn't be able to get them to stay on the topic of the play for more than ten minutes at most I sat down and turned on the recorder before anyone had settled to catch whatever I could. As soon as I turned on the recorder Lance sneezed. Not thinking much about it, I said "God bless you" and Lance said "I can't really bless myself can I?" From the beginning of the rehearsals the entire cast has made God jokes about Lance about everything from predicting the weather to appearing to our professors in their dreams. The jokes worried me because at the first reading some of the cast didn't understand who The Student was and someone even said "I understand who The Student is suppose to stand for but who are the professors in the bible?" So when they kept referring to Lance as the all powerful Christian God I took it as a sign they still didn't get it.

When Lance responded I suddenly realized how wrong I was. The man who you were asking to bless the sneezing stranger on the bus or damn the copy machine to hell was, in fact, the unspectacular and powerless Lance. They had realized this and were laughing at the new "reality." I should've figured this out ages ago but I was too convinced they just didn't get the concept. My fault for not having faith in them and the clarity of the play's concept—I suppose this shows just how much I didn't trust them to do their homework as actors.

My hope for the success of the interviews rose as the cast, without my provoking, started talking about the play.

Not trusting their attention span, right off I asked everyone to define the message of the play. "Have faith" was the resounding reply. Then they talked for four hours about life in general but also about why they thought humans have to have faith in something and the beauty in Harvey and Edna's finding happiness in the small things. They expressed their hopes that the

audience would go home and begin to notice and appreciate the same. I want to sit and talk like this with all my casts. At 3:00 I moved rehearsal to the Grove where barefoot in the grass we ran the play with a park bench for a table and two little boys playing tag as our audience. The lines about sex the entire cast whispered because of the little ears around. The cast was refreshed, inspired and unified and their rehearsal reflected their new energy and understanding, even if they blanked out on their lines toward the end. Although we were scheduled till only 5:00 we ran through it once and left around 6:30 when the sun started setting and the wind picked up.

March 6th – Monday, 7-9pm First tech rehearsal

We've got the Periodic Table and the Milky Way Galaxy for the upstage walls, but The Student needs a poster to put on the easel. Since none of the posters promised look as if they are coming through in time I went online and found pictures of as many muscular and bare-chested ancient gods as I could and put them all on a poster board. The idea was that The Student was going to use the visual aid as examples of how humanity keeps personifying him. In my head I created this fantastic speech for him about how every culture has created the gods it needed. The Sumerians created vengeful, angry gods because of their region's constant famine and drought. The Egyptian gods were as good as they were bad to reflect on the life and death supported by the Nile. I also thought the pictures of Zeus, Poseidon and Michelangelo's God from the Sistine Chapel with rippling muscles stood in beautiful contrast to tall, skinny and pale Lance. In fact, I couldn't help but think what an ego boost it must have been for The Student that pictures of "Him" always had him shirtless with abs of steel.

Jessica's cast was our audience and they laughed! Pep sped through his lines and started mugging again, Lance was not breathing and became almost incoherent with how fast he spoke and Kerri said "um" before every one of her lines until the professors' huddle at the end at which point all three actresses started reading the lines they had written on their notepads. I hadn't expected everyone to get so thrown off by an audience, but the cast knew what they had done wrong before I could give notes. Not much was said besides, "you guys are better than that." Our last practice is tomorrow.

March 8th—Wednesday Opening Night

Tonight's it. The flyers have been up for a week, there's an ad up on thefacebook.com and every theater related group online has a note on it's message board. I put out a bulletin on MySpace.com, sent out two Greenroom e-mails to the entire department, and yesterday I put personal notes in every professor's mailbox inviting them to come tonight or tomorrow. I'm making cast gifts, printed out the instructions for my cast members to conduct the interviews and all that's left is to make sure I have cameras and tripods. During the intermission between shows Lance, Pep, Paige and myself are going to ask individual audience members if they'd talk about the show or at least answer some questions about the show to test if the show communicated it's message clearly- something we'd never do for a normal show, but since this is a thesis project I thought having concrete results were important.

Here's what I typed up for each of them:

YOU ROCKED-- Your camera is set up in room _____. Please ask people as they leave the studio if they mind being interviewed and if that doesn't work, grab friends loitering around. I will come around and get everyone before intermission ends. Here are some questions to get them talking. (Record is the red button ☺) THANK YOU! -Jenn

What was your favorite moment/Did anything really stick with you?

Who was your favorite character?

Did you find yourself connecting with one character in particular? Who? Why?

**Did you find that the play was offensive in anyway?

****Does the play have a message, and if so, what is it?

I arrived at the studio at 5:30 planning to waltz in, turn on the music, set up the cameras and serenely wait for the show to start. Instead I waltzed in greeting the first audience members, and noticed the studio lights weren't on and that Jessica's cast was setting up seats around a bare stage.

With 20 minutes till curtain, the audience walking in, a bare stage, no hope for house lights, everyone in costume and me in heels and a skirt- I got the set up. Fumbling in the dark, and apologizing to confused audience members I retrieved set pieces from between their legs and behind their heads. Failing miserably at not looking panicked I realized this was the first time I was setting up most of these props and could only hope everything was in the right starting place. I grabbed Paige and asked her to get the water. I grabbed two guys from the other cast and sent them to retrieve our table and chairs from the second floor. Jessica roped her boyfriend into helping her set up the stage lights.

Yet, the coup de grace was when the poster tacks wouldn't go into the walls they had been placed in every day for a week. I felt as if I was putting on a Three Stooges act- in skirt and heels I tried to hold up a three foot poster while nailing thumbtacks into what looked like plaster but was actually concrete. Seeing my distress, Jamie, (a rather large and strong actor from the other play) took the hammer and started pounding on the wall. Under his efforts every last tack bent and with no other options I gave up and called places while hunting around the audience's chairs for the professor's legal pads. There was no time to set up the interview rooms or put tapes in the cameras and in the craziness I forgot our newest prop- a block for Mary Bess to rest her leg.

It was 6:00 but since the music started late, my perfectly timed song I told the cast to listen for as the cue to begin hadn't played. Completely embarrassed, I had to walk back through the set, through the curtain, to a very confused cast and instruct them to start as soon as I turned the music down. As the music faded and the cast entered I pressed record on the one camera I had set up to record the show. It beeped and died. I hadn't checked the battery.

I also hadn't noticed that there were audience members sitting to the upstage left of my actors- exactly where I had sworn to the cast there would be no seating so the girls would stop worrying about putting their backsides in someone's face. To make things even more exciting, the one theater professor that came that night was sitting in those seats. My poor cast not only had no posters to look at or walk to, they were also visibly worried about turning their backs to their acting teacher which was virtually impossible since he was upstage of everything.

As if the above wasn't enough, they also expected bigger laughs. Out of nerves Kerri stomped all over the laughs there were and Mary Bess reverted to pushing too hard for laughs, something I hadn't seen her do since auditions. Pep played Harvey angrier than he's ever been practically making Mary Bess cry onstage and almost scaring Lance off the stage into the audience and his acting professor's lap.

Another exciting moment was when, because there was no announcement and audiences are like sheep, no one moved during intermission and the audience looked rather confused as to if the play was over and why they were sitting in the dark.

Tomorrow I'm making sure the batteries are charged around 2:00 pm and getting to Isom around 4:00 to set the chairs and everything else set up before anyone even has a chance to walk in. I should have been backstage wishing my actors broken legs but instead I was running in a dark room through the set looking completely unprofessional. I also realized we didn't have flyers with the night's run and performers on them. We should have printed something up if only because the actors names weren't on anything but the e-mails I sent out and they deserve recognition. Also, if the words "10 minute intermission" had been printed between the show titles, the lack of house lights to announce intermission wouldn't have been a problem.

At the end of Jess's show I grabbed four people, all young theater majors, and asked them my questions because by then I had found a camera with a live battery. All four said they enjoyed the show, had found a favorite character that they personally related to and when asked what the show was about both groups said something to the extent of "Life and how you have to appreciate every moment of it." All four also said they thought they would think about the show and its message afterwards. None were offended and thought the concept was interesting and thought provoking and that they would recommend the show to their friends.

I was encouraged by the feedback and made sure to spread the word to the cast. Despite the fact that today was the most awkward opening night I could have imagined, if the audience enjoyed themselves I have no regrets to take from this night- only lessons.

March 9th, 6-8 pm Last show

It's over.

After the fiasco Wednesday I got to Isom at 4:30 and set up while playing the opening music. Just me setting up chairs and glasses and posters for the last time in the open space I've seen more in the last month than my bedroom. Everything in the room had been thought about, debated and finally allowed in the space. I was God setting my stage.

The actors came in around 5:30 again. Well, all except for Mandy who made me and everyone else panic by not coming in till 5:58. The show started when she got dressed.

The house lights worked and the music played exactly as I planned it. Mary Bess had a block to elevate her leg, the cast had posters to examine and best of all, no one sat upstage of the action.

Battery aplenty I filmed the whole thing and the improvement from Wednesday was such a relief. Pep came up to me afterwards and apologized because he said he did badly. All I could do was hug him, it's too late for regrets!

It worked. It made our audiences think and they got the message. They laughed.

Despite all my standing in its way, *The Whole Shebang* was a success.

Chapter 4: Self Critique and Analysis

From day one of my directing classes I was told that to have any hope of producing a show, a necessary façade of omnipotence must exist so that the notoriously stubborn people called actors will revere, respect, and respond to everything I say. What this statement lacks is a clause explaining that it only pertains to the real world.

As long as I am a student I will never get the same respect from my classmates that a non-student director will. However, throughout my past experiences directing within the department, I have tried to keep a professional air that commands respect or, at the very least, punctuality. Since my actors saw me as a classmate posing as a director, my attempts at being a professional and focused director came at the expense of a reputation as an unsociable and uptight person. Although neglect to come to rehearsals, tardiness, and lackluster line memorization is fairly common among student actors when performances do not directly affect their grades; I believe my lack of a personal connection with my previous casts only heightened these problems, hindering the rehearsal process and lessening the quality of the final product.

Since the definition of insanity is doing the same thing but expecting different results, for this project I decided to try a more personal approach to directing by taking an interest in who my actors were rather than just what and how they were doing within the rehearsal process. It started with the frighteningly low audition turnout and the fact that once I had a cast, two of the six backed out leaving me without a play till I scrounged up two more volunteers. Suddenly Lance, Mary Bess, Pep, Paige, Kerri and Mandy were not just people I had to deal with; they were the facilitators without whom my project did not exist. My intense gratitude and respect for

these six actors was reflected in my dealings with them, and I now realize that I got the respect I was looking for after I gave it.

I came into the first rehearsal with the determination to let the actors do their job by keeping myself out of their way. My primary reasoning for this was that while directing past shows I tended to micromanage the acting by giving specific psychological gestures, explaining motivation for action and even the occasional line reading. Not only was I hindering the actors' creative process and the overall quality of the show by giving them information that, if discovered on their own would seem more natural, but by verbally stepping on stage I was invading their space and disrespecting them as artists as well as taking my focus off the overall storyline of the play.

Overall, trusting the actor was by far one of the most important things I learned, second only to trusting myself. However, my efforts went a little too far in this first try. After I gave the blocking, I never looked at my prompt book again, trusting them to remember their own blocking and allowing me to watch the action instead of burying my head in the book tracking blocking changes. I realize I should have at least followed the script on the day their lines were due, because, looking back, there were a number of clever lines simply left out and one delightful moment when Harvey and Edna were suppose to say a line in unison that never happened.

In early rehearsals we ran the sections of the show stopping almost exclusively to correct blocking. Instead of imposing my vision of the characters, I used the first few rehearsals to observe where the actors looked like they were going with the characters. I waited till the end of a run to give everyone notes that were nudges in the right direction rather than my usual pushes. Trusting the actor meant sitting still and silent for most of the rehearsal, but by thinking a note

through before I gave it I found what I said almost always came out clearly, and afterwards I had no qualms that I had mired the actor's character development and harmed the entire performance. To my delight, the result was that all of their speech patterns and most of the movement looked natural and unhindered.

By staying out of their way I learned that trusting the actors' ability is not only necessary but very freeing. I attribute my success to the fact that there were so many other things to focus on before and during rehearsals. I was so busy following all six actors' physical and psychological relationships with each other, the immediate focus of the beats, the overall focus of the play, and making sure that all six could be seen, heard, and had focus when needed; that how an actor delivered one of their lines (unless I noticed they were consistently off for a few rehearsals), was the least of my concerns.

I quickly found that I was too worried about getting everything together before rehearsals to greet everyone as they walked in the door. However, convinced that making personal connections with my cast was the key to earning their respect, I began arriving a half-hour early instead of my usual 15 minutes. This afforded me time to get my notes together and the space set up before the actors arrived. When they did arrive, I found I could be pleasant and socialize until it was time to start rehearsal.

I think the effort to get to know my cast was one of the keys to the play's success. One Saturday Lance was sick and asked Kerri to tell me instead of calling me beforehand. Paige and Mandy showed up only to be sent home at five after. Instead of acting on my frustration I called Lance and offered to bring him soup or to give him a ride to the doctor. The call was motivated by a blend of genuine concern for his health and knowing that the sooner he got better the sooner we could rehearse again. Two weeks later after Thursday night's performance, Lance pulled me

aside and told me that my call really meant something to him and that since then he had been determined to give me and the play his all.

I was still worried about losing control during rehearsal, even though, midway through the rehearsal process, I was finally able to let them do their job and had figured out a good balance of friend and director before rehearsals. If I stopped the action to give a note to an actor for more than a second or two, however, someone would start talking. I was still convinced (and admittedly paranoid) that the interruptions were a sign of disrespect and a loss of control over the rehearsal and found there was an uncomfortable silence after I stopped the storyteller when I am pretty sure all six actors thought, "Bitch," in unison. However, Sergeant-at-Arms is one of the many roles you take on as a director and there are worse things, like not getting anything done.

But then I got sick. About halfway through the rehearsal process I got a round of vaccinations while nursing a cold. For the next three rehearsals I had a fever and flu-like symptoms and the will but not the energy to combat their desire to talk. After the first day, powerless against the interruptions, I reconciled myself to letting the quips go unhindered and realize now it was the best thing that could have happened to the show.

While sick all I could do was observe, something that, despite my marked improvements, I was still not doing enough of. I found that the actor's jokes did not come from their disrespect of me or the actor I was talking to, but instead that the storyteller had found a line particularly funny and they wanted to share their discovery. As we laughed I could see the entire cast making personal connections between the script and their lives. Within seconds I would say, "let's go," and we would back up a few lines and start again, but this time there was a new energy in the delivery and the cast's response to it. I have never seen anything bond seven people so quickly as the moments when the entire cast was on the floor laughing mid-rehearsal.

Encouraged by the rise in morale I began listening and acting on my first instincts more, to the benefit of my directing technique. Instincts are the best tool a director has and during this project I discovered how to trust mine. I learned to stop second-guessing myself when relaying to the actors what I wanted; when to wait with a line note and when to interject; to make immediate, entire-play-changing decisions without batting an eye and to seek help when I knew I needed it. The fact that I did not listen to all of my first instincts and now regret it is only proof that I have developed the ability but am still learning how to use it.

Perhaps the most poignant example of the consequences of not listening to my instincts was The Student's encounter with the easel. To make the easel fall, its screws had to be loose throughout the beginning of the show, including the audience's entrance into the studio—that should have been the first red flag. The first time I set the easel up, Mandy walked by it to get to her place and it collapsed. At that moment, instead of being inspired by a challenge and asking everyone to walk softly, I should have thrown it out the window. My desire to have the bit work was so beyond reason that I ignored everything around me telling me it was an awful idea. Lance started to hate doing the bit, one of the legs shattered, Paige got a splinter and it became a two people and five minute job to set it up each rehearsal. Somehow, through the entire process I remained convinced that the bit would be a golden moment in the show. The small chuckle it inspired was, in no way, worth the trouble it caused.

Knowing that I have the uncanny tendency to overlook huge holes in logic, such as having the professors drink water and keeping the easel; the most daunting aspect of directing is that with one thoughtless sentence I can destroy any hope an actor has of figuring out his character.

I thought I had learned my lesson, having seen many fellow actors, myself included, thrown off track by a carelessly worded statement from a director they trusted. Nevertheless, even with all my efforts not to say one of these entire character changing statements, I have to admit I did.

After the actors were off book and I started critiquing more lines, Lance's creation-of-sex monologue was still really flat. I thought The Student would think that sex, the balance for all that was wrong in the world, his self proclaimed cause of "enlightened action," was the most important part of his most important creation. So, I stopped Lance one day during this speech and told him to have more confidence and to stop playing the stereotypical nerd. What I wanted him to do was to act more confident and focused during the monologue. Although the monologue did get immediately better, The Student became more confident throughout the rest of the show as well.

With his new confidence, the energy in the beginning was lopsided. There were three out of four very controlled people on stage for the opening 20 minutes, and the dialogue became incredibly boring. I was starting to lose sleep over how to make the exchanges more interesting. A week before opening, Lance's voice squeaked when trying to defend himself to Harvey. That was it! The Student had too much confidence and I realized I had never felt The Student was worried about his thesis failing till it happened and he began sulking.

I told Lance we needed to try something different by making the Student as much of a geek as he could. He responded that that's what he wanted to do in the beginning but that I had told him to be confident. And that is when it hit me. To Lance's credit, he had given me exactly what I asked for. Soon after we removed my shackles from Lance's creativity, I had a sweet, lovable, ungainly, unpretentious and, most importantly, petrified-of-failing Student.

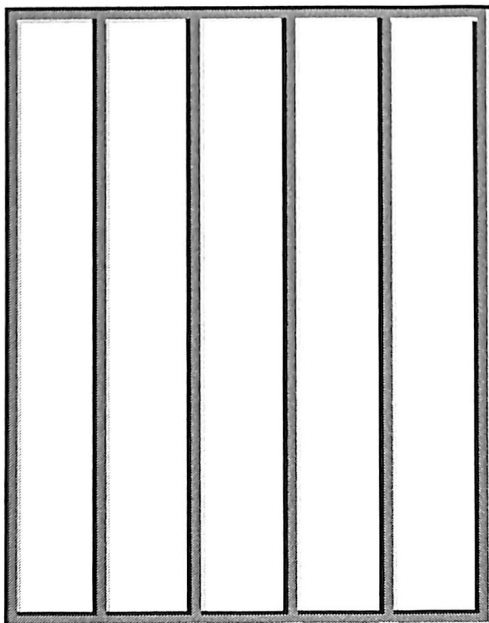
So, despite my fears, allowing the cast to see that I was not, in fact, an all-knowing, all-powerful supreme-being worked out better than I dared to hope. I do not, however, think that the same will be true in the professional world outside of school and am fully prepared to walk into the next rehearsal hall with the façade of omnipotence veiling the flawed human who will probably want them to try something with an easel.

Appendix



The Whole Shebang

Directed By Jennifer Webre
Written By Rich Orloff



**Hello,
Out There...**



Directed By Jessica Rosa
Written by William Saroyan

-----*March 8-9*-----

6:00 pm

Isom Hall Rm 202

**There will be no late seating*

Prop List

1 Large Table	(From Isom room 323)
1 Small Table	(From Isom studio 202)
5 Chairs	(From Isom studio 202)
1 Curtain/Door	(From Isom studio 202)
1 Easel	(\$15 at Art Supply)
1 Small Globe	(\$5 at Sue's Rummage Shoppe)
Large stack of Office Paper	(From SMBHC recycling)
3 Legal Pads	(Donated by The Webre family)
3 Pencils	(Donated by Jennifer Webre)
1 Poster of Periodic Table	(On loan from Brandon Niemeyer)
1 Poster of Milky Way Galaxy	(On loan from Jennifer Webre)
1 Beta Fish and Bowl	(On loan from Kerri Key)
4 Drinking Glasses	(On loan from Pep Speed)
1 Pitcher of Water	(On loan from Pep Speed)
1 Poster with Pictures of Deities	(\$1.60 poster board & public access pictures found online)

Total cost: \$21.60 (of \$50.00 budget)

Costumes and Make Up

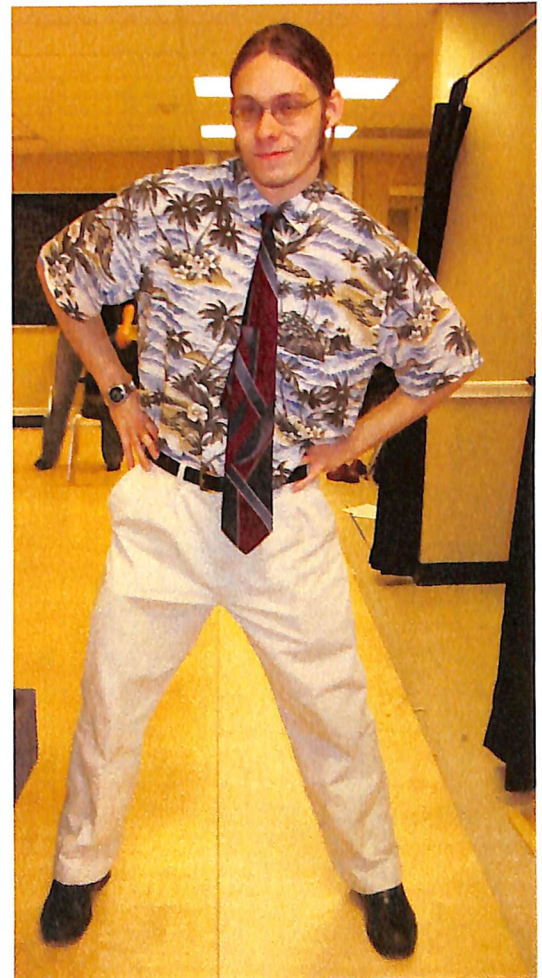


Dean:

- Red Jacket
- Black Pants
- Black Shoes
- Black Socks
- Age Make-Up
- Hair Neatly Up

The Student:

- Hawaiian Shirt
- Unmatched Tie
- Khaki Pants
- Belt
- Brown Shoes
- Glasses
- Watch
- Unshaven





Professor B:

- Green Sarong
- Black Shirt
- Black Skirt
- Black Socks
- Hair up loosely in Chop Sticks



Professor A:

- Black Jacket
- Black Pants
- Black Shoes
- Black Socks
- Glasses
- Hair neatly up



Harvey:

Age Make-Up
 Pajama Pants
 White Undershirt
 Barefoot
 Unshaven

Edna: (Not Shown in Costume)

Nightgown
 Hair in Rollers
 Pink Slipper & Cast
 Age Make-Up

THE WHOLE SHEBANG
by Rich Orloff

CHARACTERS

The Student: mid 20's, earnest, enthusiastic, and currently rather anxious
 The Dean: wise, patient, experienced, balanced
 Professor A: skeptical, critical, cool
 Professor B: instinctual, passionate, warm
 Harvey: near 40, average, unexceptional, human
 Edna: Harvey's wife, same age, also average, unexceptional, human

SCENE:

A college classroom. The present.

Before the play begins we hear the following announcement:

VOICE: ^{Prof. A: skeptical, critical, cool} The following is a true story. ^{Prof. B: instinctual, passionate, warm} Some minor changes have been made because the actual event took place in a dimension beyond human comprehension.

[Lights up on a college classroom, arranged for an oral exam. PROFESSORS A and B and the DEAN sit behind a large table. On the table are strewn all sorts of papers, photographs, charts and such. Each professor has a legal-sized note pad. Across from where the professors sit is an area where students give their presentations. In this area could be some visual aids, such as the periodic table of the chemical elements, Leonardo da Vinci's diagrams of man and woman etc. At the side are a few chairs. As the scene begins, DEAN and both PROFESSORS are chatting amiably.]

DEAN: ... and all in all, it was one of the best presentations I've seen this semester. 'A' plus work from start to finish. I'm sure that's one student who's going to go far.

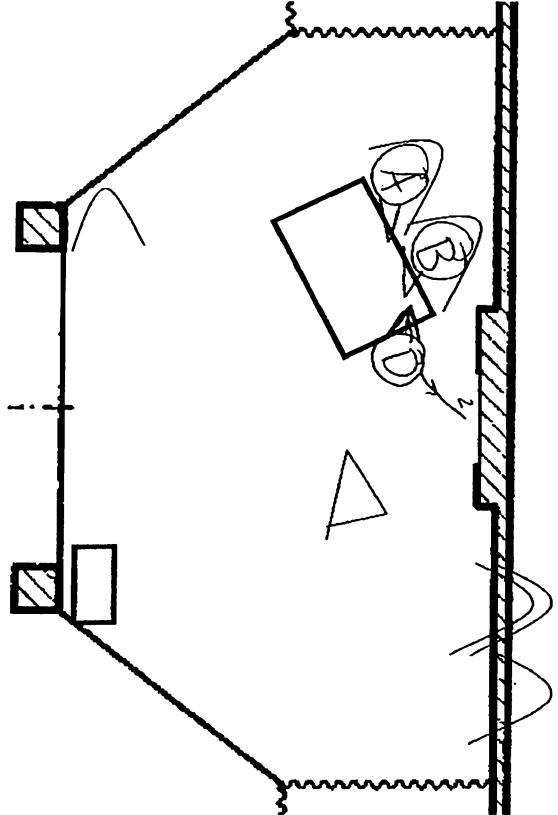
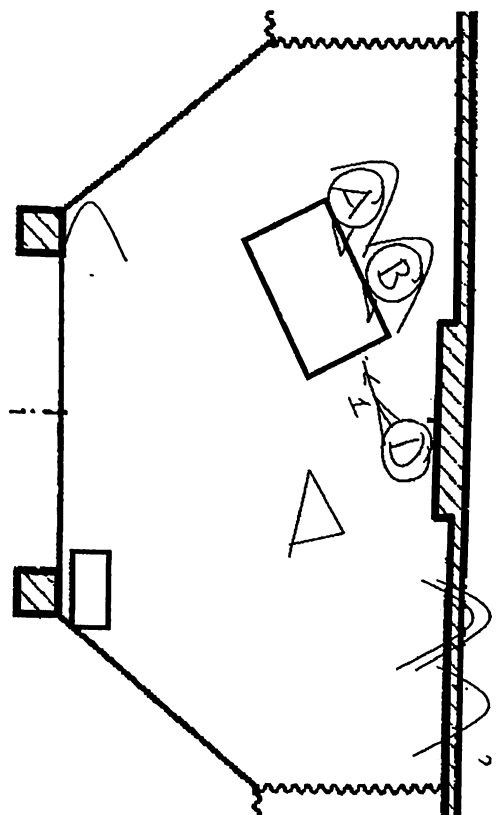
PROFESSOR B: I'm glad to hear it.

DEAN: *[checking his watch]* We might as well start.

PROFESSOR A: No reason to make the poor boy more nervous than he already is.

(2)

1



[DEAN crosses to the door, opens it and calls out.]

DEAN: Are you ready?

STUDENT: [O.s./A bundle of nerves] Yeah...I'm...I'm, uh...

DEAN: It's time to start

STUDENT: I'm coming.

[STUDENT enters. He carries a globe, briefcase and some papers, etc. He appears very anxious and pressured.]

STUDENT: [Cont'd /To DEAN] I'm uh, there is—there's just one part of my presentation I don't have with me yet.

DEAN: Do you want us to wait?

STUDENT: Oh no. My roommate is getting it. It should be here any second now... I hope.

DEAN: Please relax. This is just an informal review.

STUDENT: You told me my grade depended on this.

DEAN: [Comforting] Try not to think about it.

PROFESSOR B: We've all read your thesis and supporting material...

[puts hand on tall stack of material]

PROFESSOR A: [Wishing there had been less] All of it... you can fill me in on anything I missed.

DEAN: Actually I must confess I haven't gotten to all of it. I'm sure

STUDENT: I'll try my best.

DEAN: Why don't we begin with a brief summary of your project?

STUDENT: All right. For my master's thesis, I elected to devise a self-sustaining and self-evolving, matter-based ecosystem in a universe of three dimensions. And so I created the heavens and the earth.

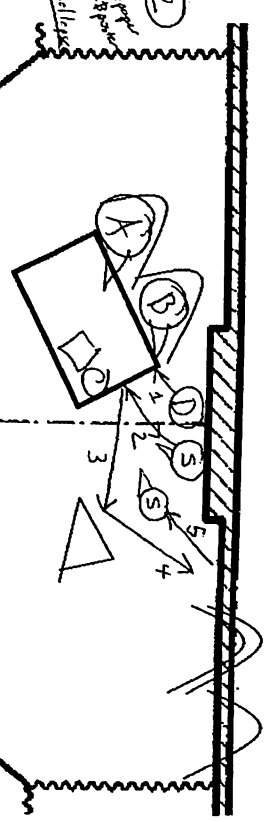
DEAN: Now that you've devised this planetary ecosystem, how do you feel about it?

PROFESSOR B: Well, to be honest... I think it's good.

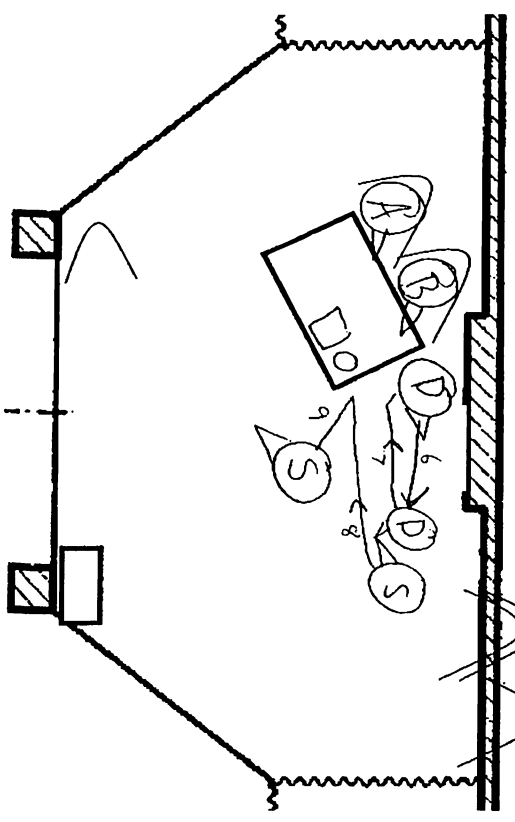
STUDENT: Certainly. I think the Earth has succeeded in every way I hoped it would. The amount of gravity is sufficient to keep things on the planet and yet light enough to let trees grow tall and animals run and jump. The weather cycle, given it's complexity, is quite efficient. Photosynthesis and oxidation balance each other effectively. All in all, the Earth is fundamentally capable of sustaining itself.

PROFESSOR A: Unless, of course, the human being blows it all up.

DEAN: The human being?



picks up globe



5

PROFESSOR A: Those are the two-legged creatures with the smelly armpits.

DEAN: Oh, yes. We'll get to them later. [To STUDENT] Go on.

STUDENT: In designing the Earth, I considered aesthetics an essential aspect. I'm fully aware I could have simplified the ecological chain; there's no vital need for zebras or kidney beans. But I wanted to create a planetary ecosystem that was not only efficient but also beautiful and wondrous.

PROFESSOR A: Kidney beans are beautiful and wondrous?

STUDENT: Maybe not, but without them, there'd only be two-bean salad. (1)

DEAN: [Pointing to the element chart] It is very impressive how much diversity you created from so few elements.

STUDENT: Thank you. It was the only way I could create a whole universe and stay within budget.

DEAN: I'm most impressed with your creation of water.

PROFESSOR A: I must admit, so am I. It may be one of the most efficient liquids any student has designed.

PROFESSOR B: I like how when the temperature drops below freezing, you've designed it so that the water falls as snowflakes instead of ice cubes.

STUDENT: Thanks. That took a lot of work.

DEAN: [Reviewing a paper] Here's a most impressive statistic: Over 453 zillion snowflakes so far and only 12 have been alike.

STUDENT: Thanks.

PROFESSOR A: By the way, why did you choose to have an ice age?

STUDENT: I... Well, to be honest, I screwed up.

DEAN: Well, that happens. It was early in the term. (2)

PROFESSOR B: I think one of your major aesthetic accomplishments is the fish. I never thought there could be one type of creature with so many colorful variations... Why you even bothered with creatures that could slither, crawl and fly, I'm not sure.

STUDENT: Well, you have to understand that... (3)

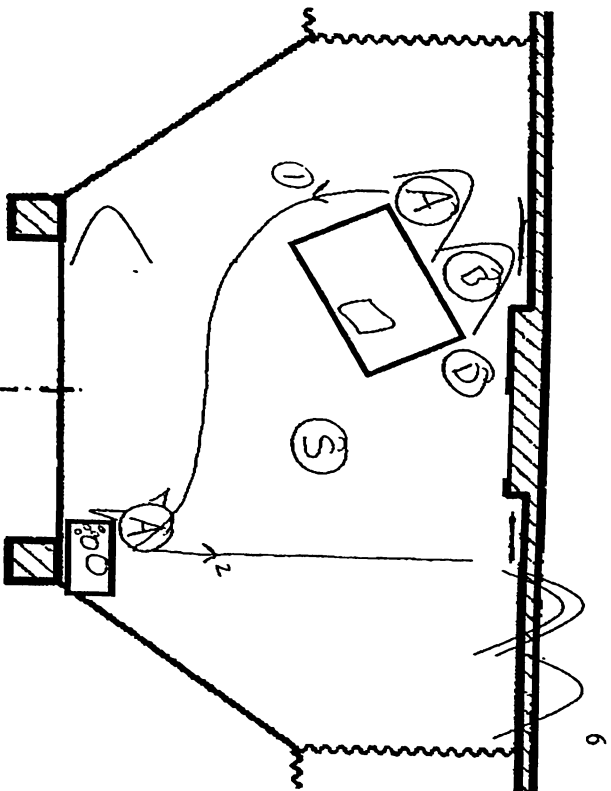
PROFESSOR B: There're just adorable. (4)

STUDENT: Thank you.

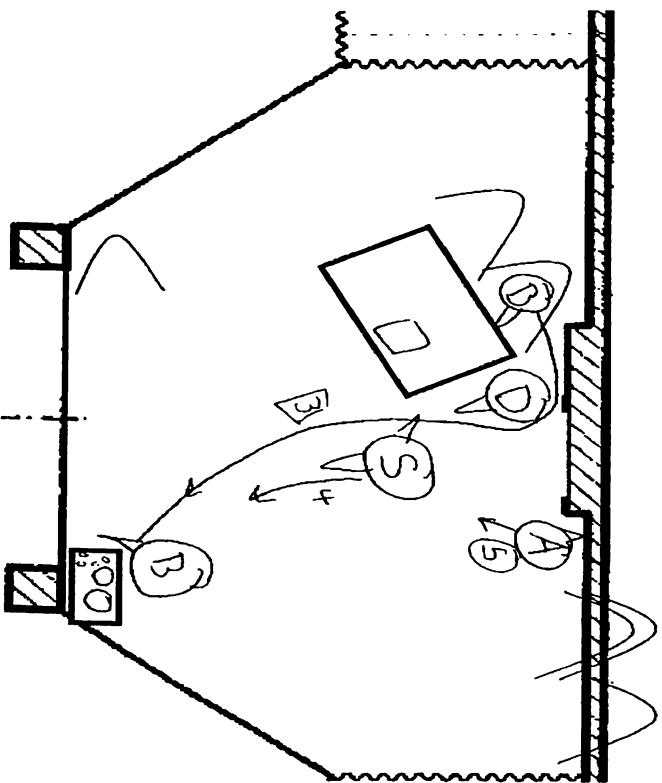
PROFESSOR B: Of course, I could do without catfish.

STUDENT: They're good scavengers.

PROFESSOR B: They're ugly. Couldn't you give them a little silver stripe down their side, or something? (5)



6



PROFESSOR A: What a bunch of self-serving rubbish.

DEAN: You don't expect to get a good grade just because you created *one* genius, do you?

STUDENT: Of course not. The species has also produced Socrates,

Freud, Madame Curie, Gandhi, Darwin—

PROFESSOR A: All of whom were resented, misunderstood, ostracized or killed. This is how human beings treat their geniuses.

PROFESSOR B: And what type of organism would let the Marx Brothers make only thirteen movies? They were easily good for another dozen.

DEAN: What I don't understand is, why are human beings so arrogant? They act as if they own the planet, just because they're one step up from apes. (2)

STUDENT: The humans do have much to be proud of.

PROFESSOR B: If any creature has a reason to be arrogant, it's the cow.

DEAN: I missed the section on cows.

PROFESSOR B: This one animal spends all day doing nothing but eating grass and at the end of the day, she secretes a liquid that is not only nutritious, but it can also become cheese and yogurt and butter and over three dozen flavors of ice cream. Now if cows aren't arrogant, why are humans? Granted some of them secrete milk too, but you can't even make cottage cheese from it. (3)

STUDENT: May I remind you the human being is the sole creature capable of transforming milk into all those other products. Without the human being, the earth would have been a mass of raw material with unrealized potential.

PROFESSOR A: Are you saying it's a better planet because of cheese doodles? (4)

STUDENT: There's more to the picture than that.

PROFESSOR A: From what I see, the rest of the planet would be just as well off if the human being didn't exist. *Stabs*

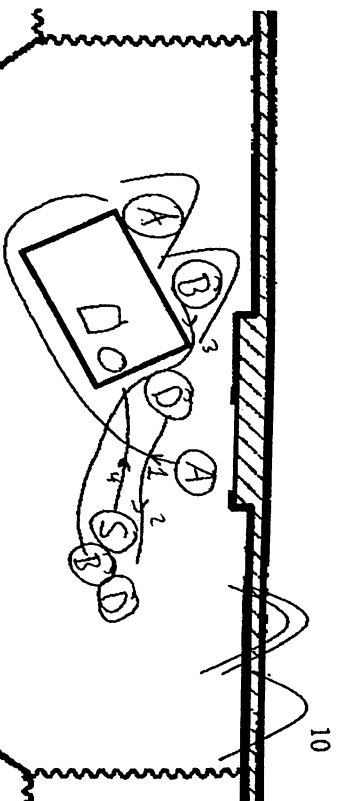
STUDENT: Yes, but—

DEAN: It appears they can barely manage their own lives, let alone the life of the planet.

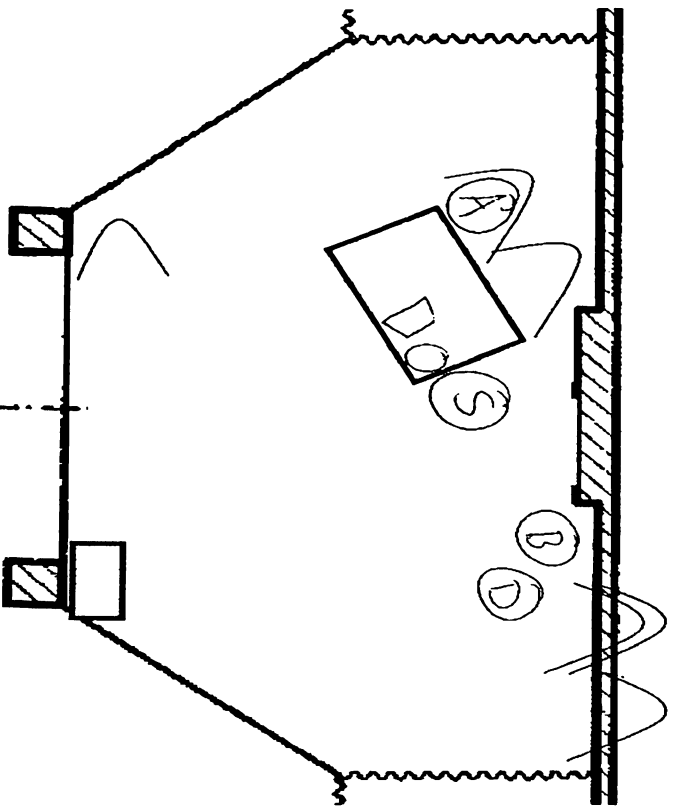
PROFESSOR A: Most of them, to quote one of their own, live "lives of quiet desperation."

PROFESSOR B: Except for New Yorkers, who seem quite vocal about it.

DEAN: Why did you give these creatures domain over the planet?!



10



STUDENT: Well, you see...

[STUDENT sighs and checks his watch.]

DEAN: Yes?

STUDENT: My roommate was suppose to transport a couple of human beings here so I could... It's very hard to understand then unless you meet them up close. They really are wondrous creatures.

PROFESSOR B: Wondrous they may be, but do you honestly think they can run the planet as well as cows? You would never see Holsteins enslaving Guernseys because of the "white cows burden."

STUDENT: Look, I'll admit it. I did make one major error in designing the human being.

PROFESSOR A: Their capacity for cruelty?

STUDENT: No.

PROFESSOR B: Their proclivity towards prejudice?

STUDENT: No.

DEAN: Their desire to destroy that which they can't control?

STUDENT: No, no, no.

DEAN: What then?

STUDENT: None of them seem to do sex right.

PROFESSOR A: They certainly try hard enough.

STUDENT: When the universe was still in draft form, I realized I had to create some mechanism to compensate for the brutalizing aspects of life, something sweet and inspiring that would ensure a peaceful planet. And so I created sex.

PROFESSOR A: [Wanting more information] And?

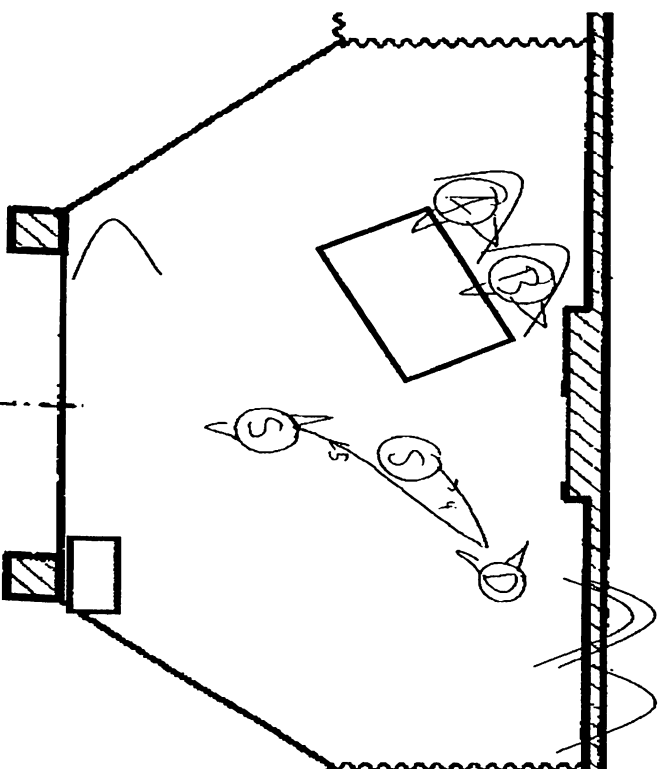
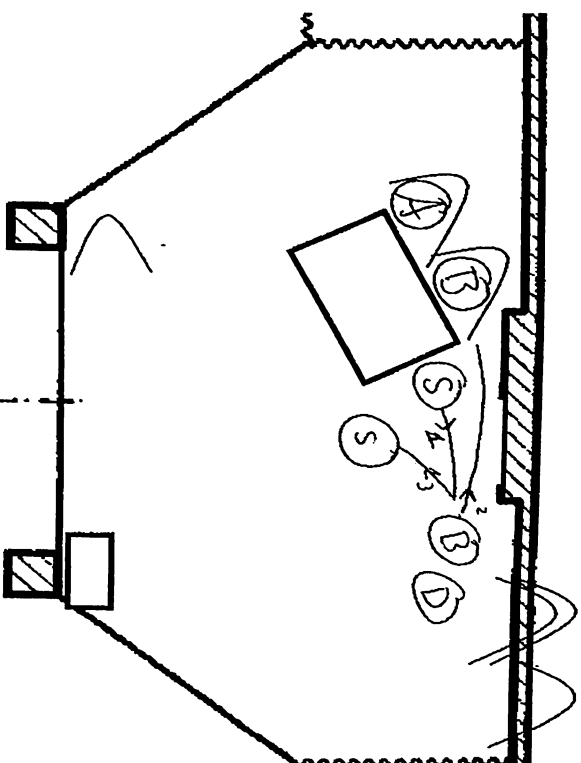
STUDENT: And I saw it was good.

PROFESSOR B: Are you saying the world would be a safer place if people had more sex?

STUDENT: Oh, no. I'm not talking about quantity; I'm talking about quality. It is psychologically impossible to detonate a nuclear device if you've just had a satisfying intimate experience.

DEAN: [Skeptical] Really.

STUDENT: Oh yes, but I don't mean just physical sex. Physical sex is good only for procreation and curing acne. But when humans are willing to reveal their souls during the sexual act, they're reunited with all of the energy flowing through the universe. This spiritual/sexual union was designed to cleanse fear from the soul, so that the human's capacity for goodness would rise to the surface and transform into enlightened action..... [Responding to the professors' disbelief] It worked great in test cases.



1

[From the hallway we hear voices]
HARVEY: [O.s.] What do you mean "Go in there"?! Maybe I don't want to go in there!

EDNA: [O.s.] Don't cause a scene!

HARVEY: [O.s.] This jerk's causing the scene! Look buddy, I don't know who you are, but I'll go in there when I'm good and ready!

[**HARVEY** comes flying into the room, as if thrown in by someone else. **EDNA** follows quickly. Both are dressed for bed. They look around, quite bewildered about what's going on.]

HARVEY: What the—

STUDENT: Oh, good. Just in time. I'm so glad you're finally here.

HARVEY: What the hell's going—

[**STUDENT** pulls up a couple of chairs.]

STUDENT: Make yourselves at home.

EDNA: [Frightened] Where are we?

STUDENT: Just sit, you're late.

EDNA: Late for what?

STUDENT: This won't take long... Please.

[**H** & **E** look at each other and hesitantly sit down]

STUDENT: [Continuing to **PROFESSORS**] I'd like to introduce two typical human beings John and Mary Doe. They're not extraordinary in any way, which is exactly why I chose them. John and Mary live with their two children in Dayton, Ohio. John works as an urban planner, helping to prepare Dayton for the next century. Mary is a doctor, specializing in internal medicine.

Although their jobs show their dedication to their fellow humans, it is as parents that John and Mary feel their greatest responsibility. Their two children are sensitive and alive, and also excellent students.

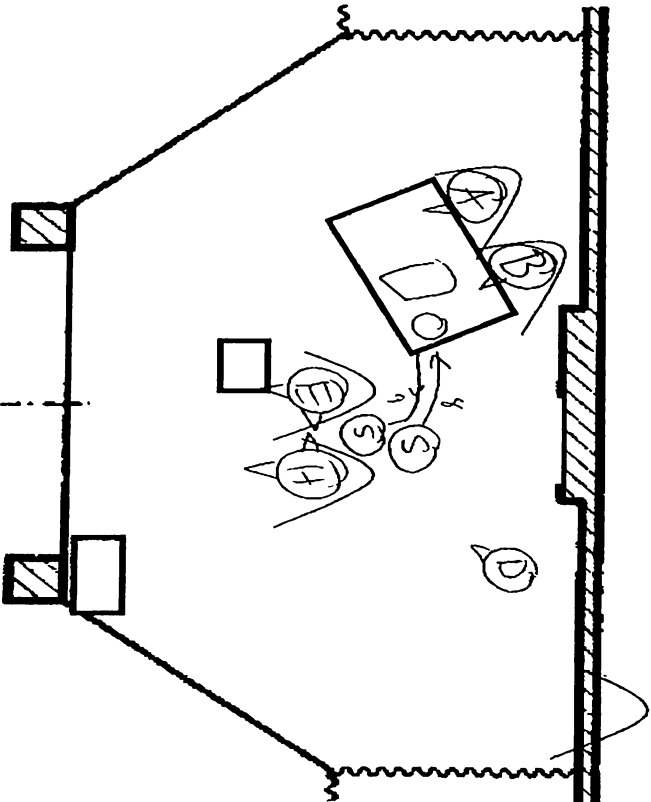
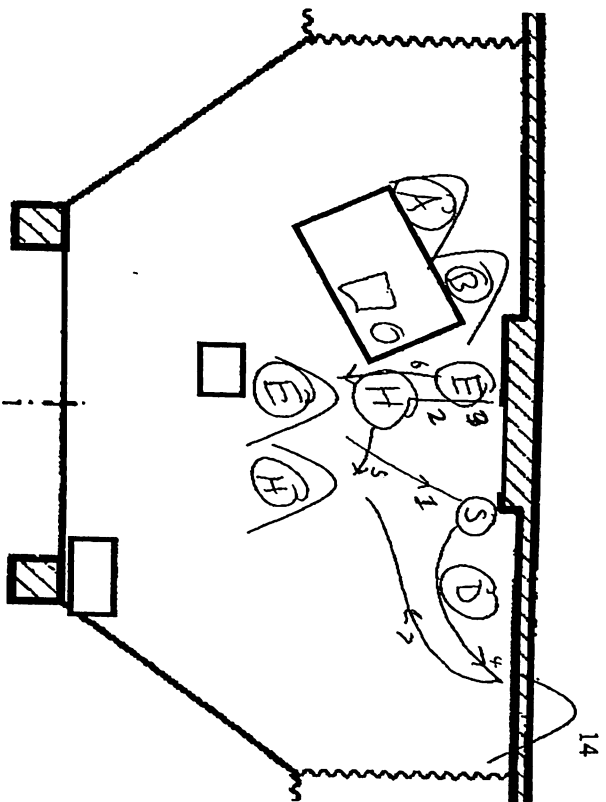
John and Mary have many hobbies. Mary plays the dulcimer, and John recycles aluminum. I am proud to put the destiny of Earth in the hands of average people like these: John and Mary Doe.

HARVEY: We're not them

STUDENT: You're not John and Mary Doe?

HARVEY: No, I'm John's brother, Harvey Doe and this is my wife, Edna Doe.

EDNA: Hi.



STUDENT: But I told my roommate specifically—

EDNA: They're on vacation. We're house-sitting for them.

STUDENT: Really? [To the PROFESSORS] See how caring the human

being is?

EDNA: Well, John and Mary have cable.

HARVEY: Uh, can I ask you a question?

STUDENT: Yes?

HARVEY: Who the hell are you and why are we here?

STUDENT: Well since you asked, my roommate teleported through a warp in dimensional barriers to Dayton, Ohio, where he realigned your molecules into a pure energetic code. Then he teleported you here and, having analyzed your cellular structure and DNA, reatomized you into this dimension.

HARVEY: Yeah, I figured it was something like that.

EDNA: You don't hope to gain information so you can destroy our planet do you?

STUDENT: oh, no.

EDNA: 'Cause we don't know anything. Honest.

PROFESSOR A: [Whispering to B] I believe them.

STUDENT: [to HARVEY and EDNA] Don't worry. This is just what, in our dimension, is the equivalent of one of your universities. These are professors in my department, and I'm a student. You're just here as part of my project.

HARVEY: Oh, yeah? What's your project?

STUDENT: I created the heavens and the earth.

[It takes a moment for this to fully sink in on EDNA and HARVEY]

HARVEY: Wait a second. Are you telling us that you are—

STUDENT: I am who I am.

EDNA: Sounds like him.

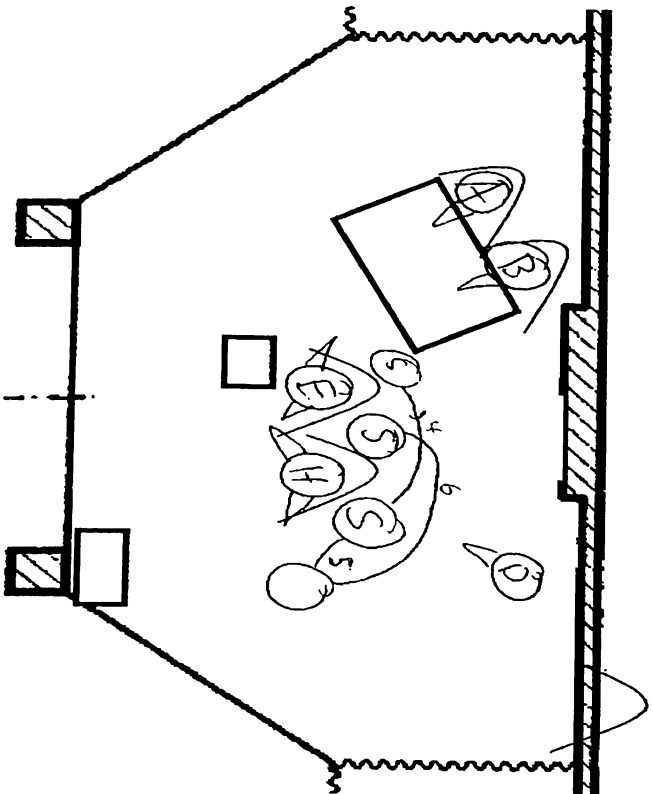
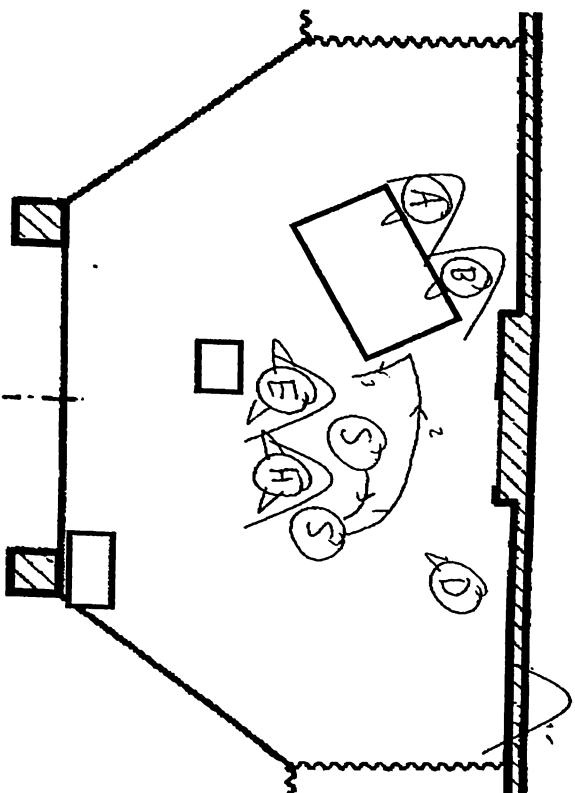
HARVEY: You mean to tell us that, like the entire universe is just like... a science fair project?

STUDENT: More or less.

HARVEY: Suddenly I feel so cheap.

STUDENT: So if my professors could just ask you some questions, it would really help my grade.

HARVEY: I work my fingers to the bone, and all I am is part of some nerd's science project?!



EDNA: Harvey, please. *[Whispering]* You'll go to Hell.
 STUDENT: Oh, don't worry. Nothing you say here will be held against you.

HARVEY: Eh, I don't care. With my luck, I could give the Pope CPR and I'd still go to hell.

STUDENT: *[Beginning to have intelligent doubts about these folks; to the PROFESSORS]* Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. These aren't the ones I planned—

DEAN: But they are average human beings, aren't they?
 STUDENT: I'm not sure they're as common as John and Mary.
 EDNA: The other day, my hair stylist called me one of the most common people she knew.

DEAN: Well then.
 STUDENT: I really don't think these people are in any condition to be questioned.

PROFESSOR A: That's too bad. I've got so many questions I'd like to ask them.

HARVEY: Go ahead, waste your time, ask about my life.
 STUDENT: Actually I think we've bothered them enough—

PROFESSOR B: I think this is a wonderful opportunity to gain some insight into the human condition.

STUDENT: But these aren't the ones I wanted to—
 DEAN: Why don't you sit and be quiet for a while?
 STUDENT: But you don't think you'll—

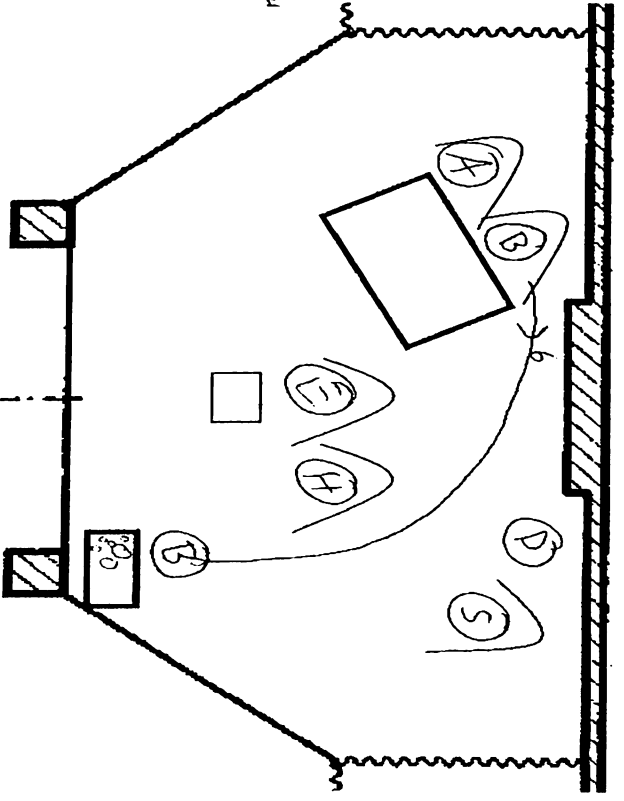
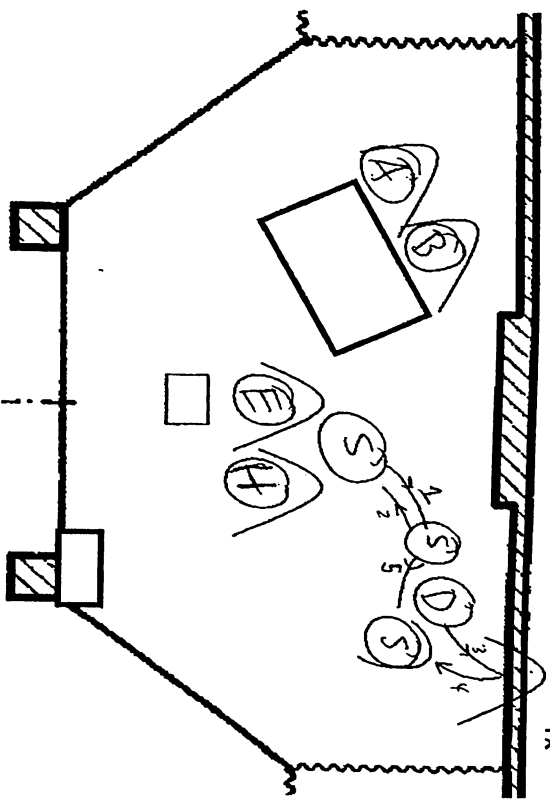
DEAN: Very quiet.
 STUDENT: But if—
 DEAN: Sit.

[STUDENT sits]
 DEAN: Now Harvey and Edna, why don't you tell us a little about yourselves.

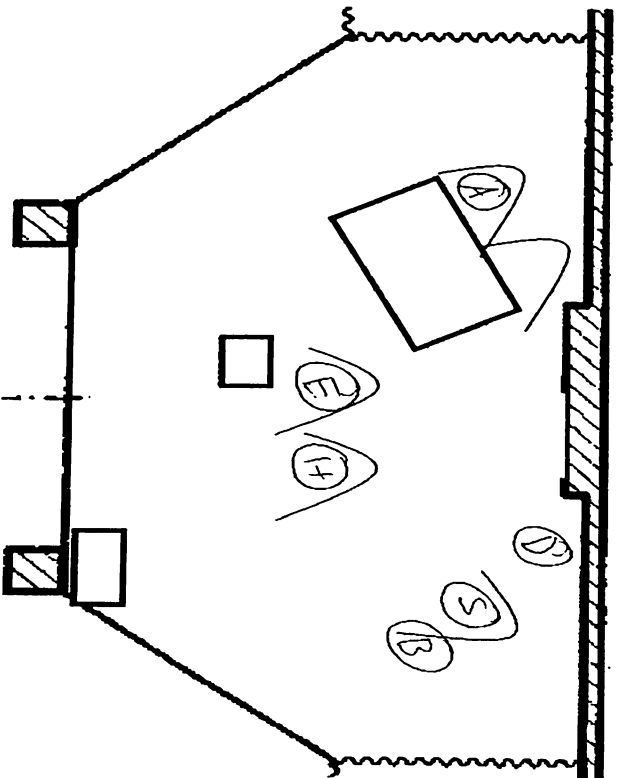
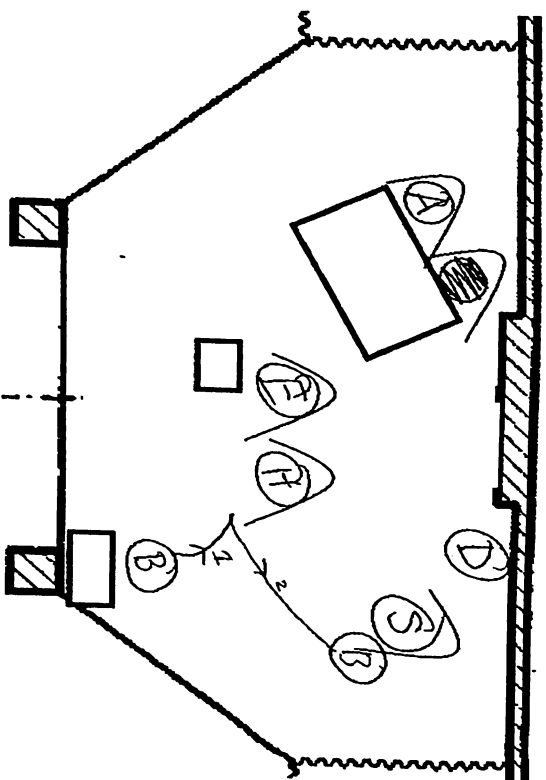
EDNA: Not much to say. We're just people. Ordinary people.
 PROFESSOR B: Harvey, what's your occupation?

HARVEY: You mean. What did I use to do before a bunch of pea brained assholes laid me off?
[STUDENT sighs]

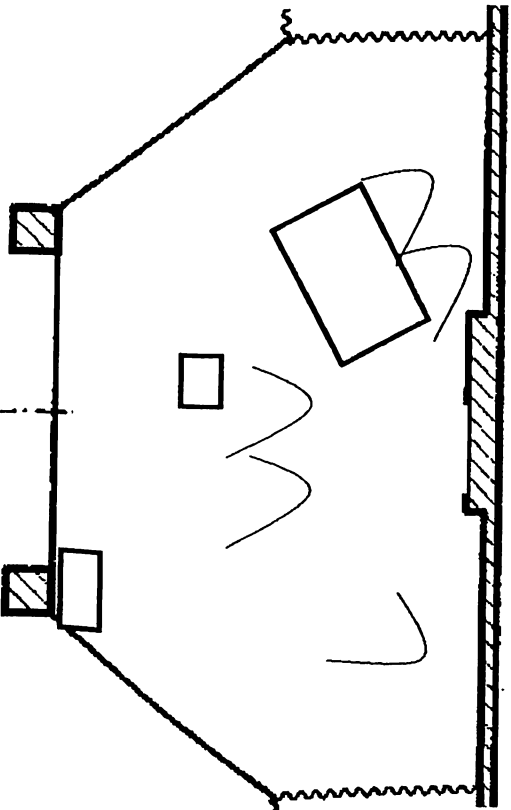
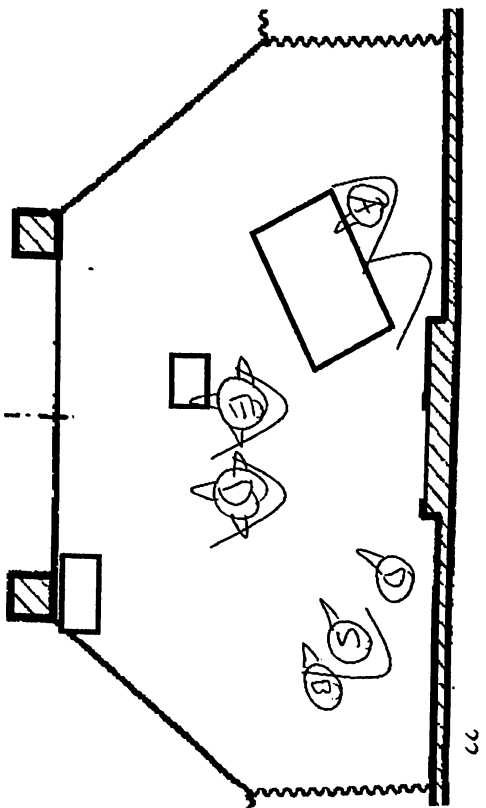
DEAN: Yes.
 HARVEY: For fourteen years, I worked on an assembly line. I got up every morning, drove twenty miles and spent eight hours tightening nuts.



PROFESSOR A: Why were you laid off?
 HARVEY: My entire division was replaced by a silicon chip.
 PROFESSOR A: I see. ^{88. Why? The P. worker}
 HARVEY: Apparently sand can do my job better than I can.
 PROFESSOR B: Have you tried to get help from your union?
 HARVEY: Not yet. But I do plan to talk to my local union official, as soon as he's paroled.
 EDNA: The guy was framed.
 HARVEY: It's her brother.
 EDNA: He was doing a friend a little favor. If the government hadn't wiretapped that prostitute, nobody would have ever known.
 PROFESSOR A: Have you considered changing careers, Harvey?
 HARVEY: Well, I've thought about becoming a truck driver, but amphetamines give me headaches.
 PROFESSOR A: I see.
 HARVEY: I do have an interview next week at the toxic waste dump. They tell me garbage is a growth industry.
 DEAN: Edna, do you work?
 EDNA: Oh, yeah. I'm a directory assistance operator.
 DEAN: What's that?
 EDNA: Well, when people are too lazy or stupid to use their phone book, they call me up and I say: *[In her operator's voice]* "Directory assistance." Then they tell me who they want to call, I push a button and this computer says *[In the computer's voice:]* "The number is 465-3921." Or whatever the number is.
 PROFESSOR B: And how often each day do you do this?
 EDNA: Eight, nine hundred times.
 PROFESSOR B: Are you concerned that this might eventually become boring?
 EDNA: Oh, it got boring after the fourth call.
 PROFESSOR A: Then why don't you change jobs?
 EDNA: Gee, I don't know. Most of life is boring, isn't it?
 STUDENT: If I can just put this into the proper perspective—
 DEAN: Later. You'll get your chance.
 STUDENT: But—
 DEAN: Sit.
[STUDENT sits]



PROFESSOR A: Do the two of you have children?
 EDNA: Oh, yes, Michael, who's sixteen, and Wendy, who's just about thirteen.
 PROFESSOR B: Can you describe them?
 EDNA: They're just wonderful.
 PROFESSOR A: Harvey?
 HARVEY: They're pips.
 PROFESSOR B: Are they good students?
 EDNA: They're okay
 HARVEY: Hah.
 PROFESSOR A: What do they excel at?
 [HARVEY and EDNA think about this. Nothing comes to mind.]
 PROFESSOR A: [Cont'd] Anything?
 EDNA: Michael was just made group leader at his drug rehabilitation center.
 PROFESSOR B: Does Wendy take drugs?
 EDNA: Oh, no. Never.
 HARVEY: She just spends all day in the bathroom, dyeing her hair unnatural colors.
 EDNA: [Trying to put things in a good light.] Some of which are very creative.
 HARVEY: Yeah, like one day her heads going to end up in an art gallery.
 EDNA: She's going through a rough time. She still hasn't gotten over the shock of menstruation.
 HARVEY: [to THE STUDENT] Not to question your ways or nothing, but couldn't you think of anything better than puberty?
 STUDENT: No, not really. I tried.
 EDNA: Harvey, please.
 HARVEY: Well, he's supposed to be all-knowing and all-powerful and he can't even make their teeth grow in straight. [to THE STUDENT] Do you know how much that cost me?
 EDNA: Harvey, please. We're suppose to be representing the entire human race.
 PROFESSOR A: I think you're doing a splendid job.
 PROFESSOR B: How's your sex life?
 EDNA: Pardon me?
 HARVEY: Hey!
 DEAN: We really could use the information
 EDNA: [A bit defensive] It's fine.



PROFESSOR B: Harvey?

HARVEY: [*Unconvincingly*] Yeah, it's fine.

PROFESSOR A: So you're both completely satisfied with your sex

lives?

HARVEY: More or less.

EDNA: Completely.

PROFESSOR B: More or less?

HARVEY: [*Seeing EDNA look.*] It's fine. It's just fine.

DEAN: Is it?

HARVEY: [*to THE STUDENT*] Well, you designed women. You know how it is.

PROFESSOR A: How is it?

HARVEY: They just don't seem to like it as much as men.

EDNA: I like it.

HARVEY: [*a bit surly*] Yeah, I know you like it.

EDNA: I always fulfill my obligations, don't I?

HARVEY: I can't tell you what a turn-on that attitude is.

EDNA: Maybe it's because I get tired of hearing you yelling out

Angelina Jolie's name when you get excited.

HARVEY: I did that once, and you've brought it up fifteen million-

EDNA: I swear there isn't one actress on television he hasn't slept with.

In his mind, that is.

HARVEY: This isn't the place to discuss this.

EDNA: They want to know what we're like!

HARVEY: [*overlapping with the above; to THE STUDENT*] Hey, I've

got a question!

STUDENT: Yes?

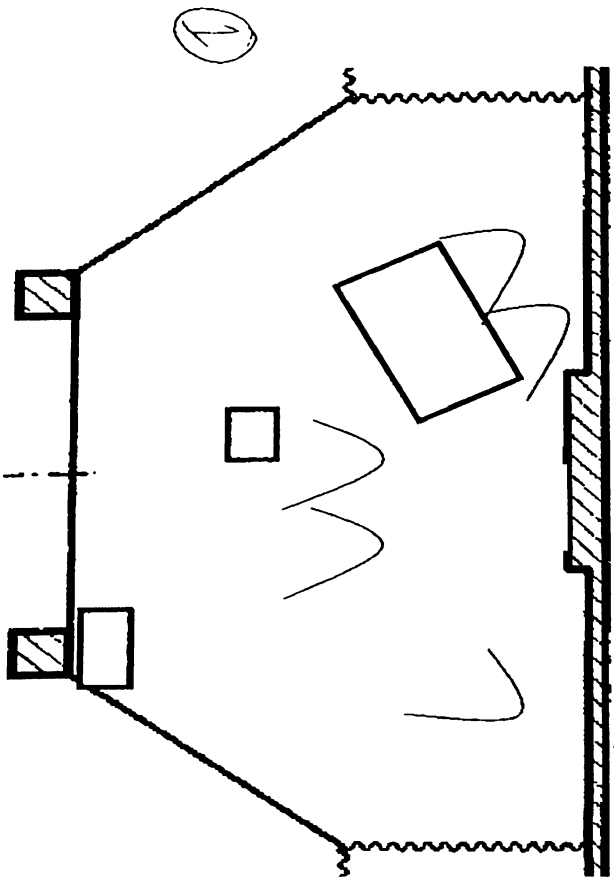
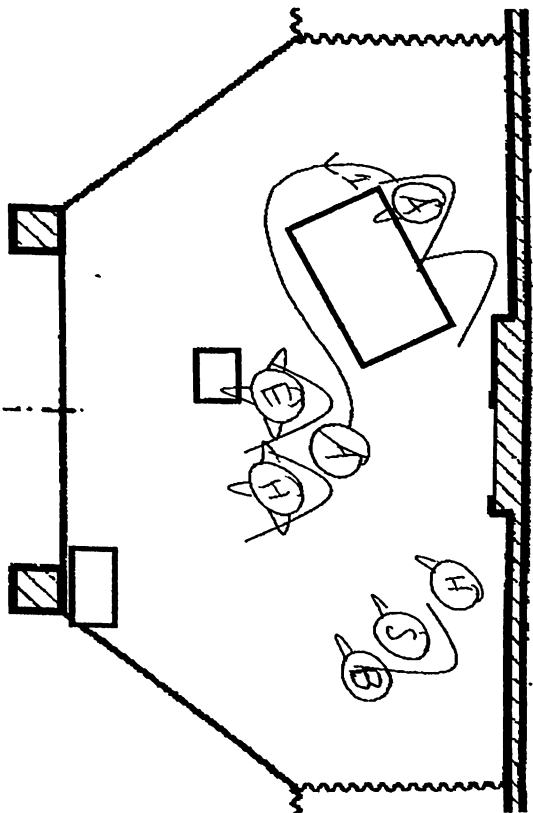
HARVEY: When you designed women, why did you make it take 'em so long to have an orgasm?

STUDENT: Actually, if their response cycle hasn't been repressed, it shouldn't take long at all.

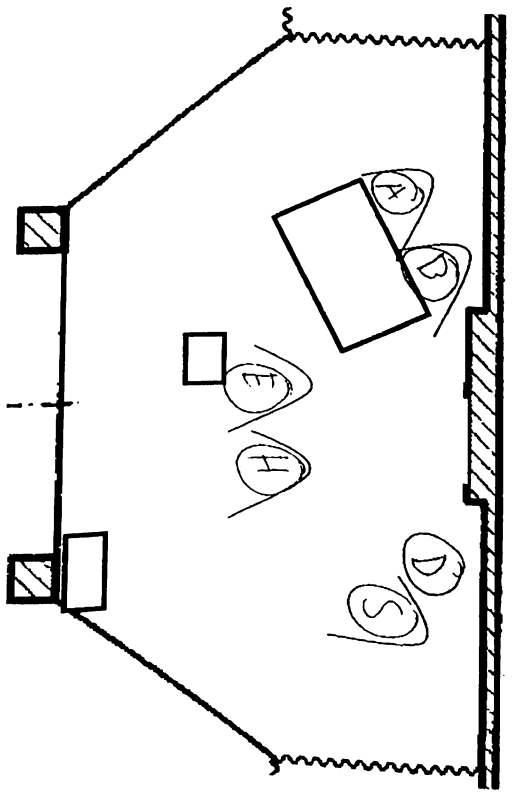
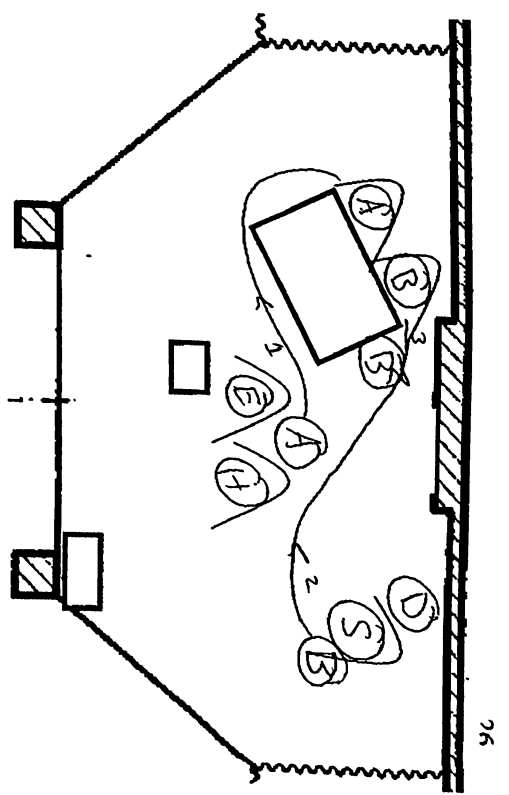
HARVEY: [*to EDNA*] See! I told you it wasn't his fault.

EDNA: Well, it wasn't mine.

PROFESSOR A: [*imitating THE STUDENT*] Excuse me. Has either of you ever had a spiritual/sexual union where you feel reunited with the energy flowing through the universe, so that all of your goodness rises to the surface and transforms into enlightened action?



HARVEY: Hey, what do you think we are – perverts?
EDNA: We have read many of the manuals. Harvey lasts up to six minutes sometimes.
HARVEY: *[Under his breath]* Those are six minutes you'll never see again.
PROFESSOR B: Do you believe that intimacy is important in a relationship?
HARVEY: You mean sex?
PROFESSOR B: No, I mean intimacy...being open and vulnerable.
EDNA: I think intimacy is the keystone of a healthy relationship.
PROFESSOR B: And what makes you say that?
EDNA: I read it in last month's *Cosmo*
DEAN: Cos-
HARVEY: It's a "woman's" magazine
EDNA: But I do think it's important. After all, without real intimacy, sex would be nothing but, uh...
HARVEY: Fun.
STUDENT: *[standing]* If I can...*[Sensing what THE DEAN is about to say]* I know – "Sit."
PROFESSOR A: Harvey and Edna, what would you say has been the best moment of your lives?
EDNA: Oh, that's easy. It was the day Harvey proposed to me. It was the first nice day of spring, and we were having a picnic in the park. I had made chicken salad sandwiches and potato salad and carrot-raisin salad and macaroni salad...
PROFESSOR B: Did Harvey make anything?
HARVEY: I think I picked up a six-pack.
EDNA: No, you were going to, but since I had to go back to the store to pick up more mayonnaise, you decided to let me get it.
DEAN: Why couldn't Harvey purchase the mayonnaise when he went to buy the six-pack?
[HARVEY and EDNA look at each other. Apparently this idea never occurred to them]
EDNA: Anyway, so we were having this picnic, and when we finished eating, I wiped Harvey's mouth with my napkin, and he wiped my mouth with his...
HARVEY: It's this thing we do.



EDNA: And, and I remember, I remember Harvey looking right in my eyes and saying... "Lets make it legal." And I thought, this man knows what I want.

PROFESSOR A: And was that day the best moment of your life, too, Harvey?

HARVEY: Uh, yeah, yeah, of course, yeah.

EDNA: You don't have to lie to them. You told me what you thought was the best.

HARVEY: Well, the day I proposed was one of the best.

PROFESSOR B: What was the best?

HARVEY: Well okay, um, it was last summer, and well, I was having this really lousy day, I mean 100% sucko lousy.

DEAN: "Sucko?"

PROFESSOR B: A colloquial adjective derived from the verb "suck."

HARVEY: The important this is the day stunk. It was like maybe a hundred degrees out and maybe a hundred percent humidity and it was even worse in the house because all of our air conditioners had just been repossessed. And then the mail came and it was all bills, big bills, and I got so upset I didn't know what to do, and so I turned on the TV. But we always get lousy reception, and this day there were so money ghosts on the tube I couldn't tell what was going on, and I got so mad I threw a shoe at the TV. It didn't break, thank uh-*(Glimpses at THE STUDENT)*

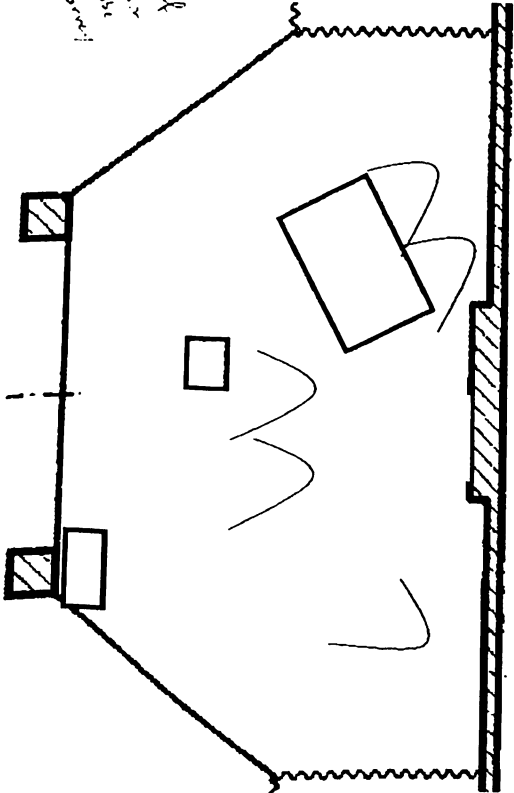
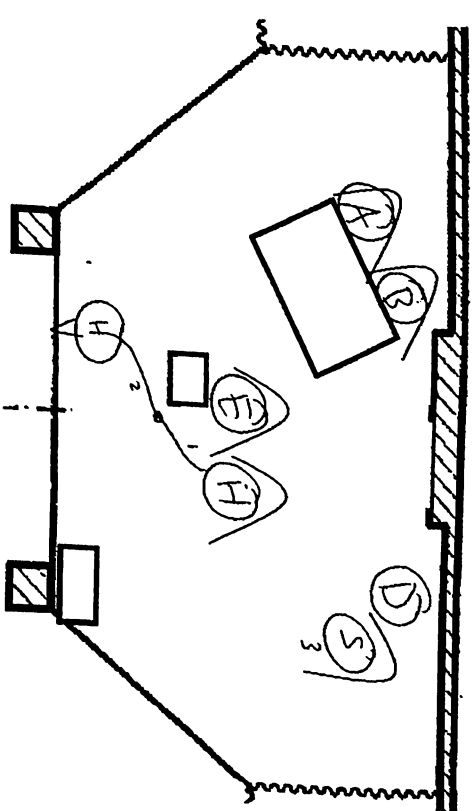
PROFESSOR A: And that was the best moment of you life?

HARVEY: I'm getting to it. So on my way to—you know, I hate being interrupted-on my way to the backyard, I stopped in the kitchen and got myself a beer. Now I don't know if any of you guys are beer drinkers. I guess not. Usually, when you drink beer, its either too cold. Or not cold enough, or it's got too much foam, or it's just a lousy brand. And you're given, but it's nothing that nothing you'd ever get enthused about. But this beer, it was delicious. Just right. I can still remember sitting in my backyard thinking, "I'm broke, I'm unemployed and I have lousy reception. But this moment, this moment, is perfect."

STUDENT: I really must interrupt--

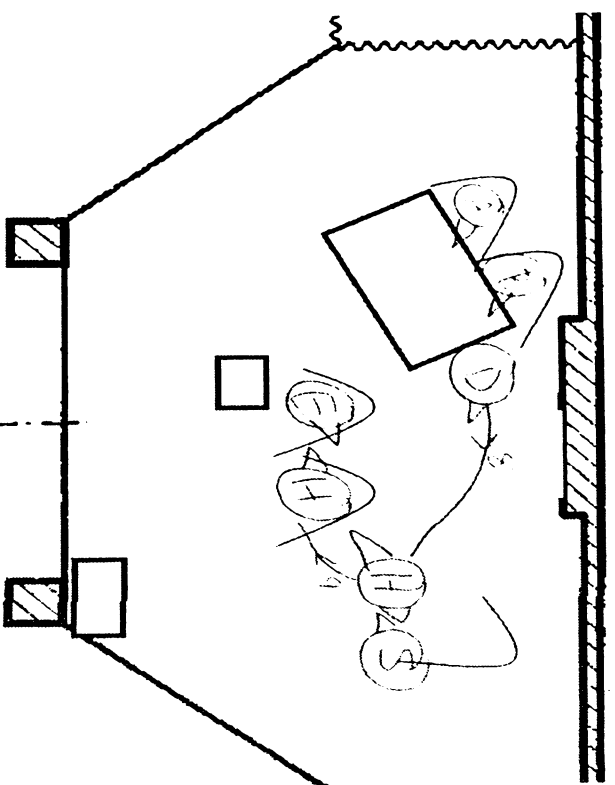
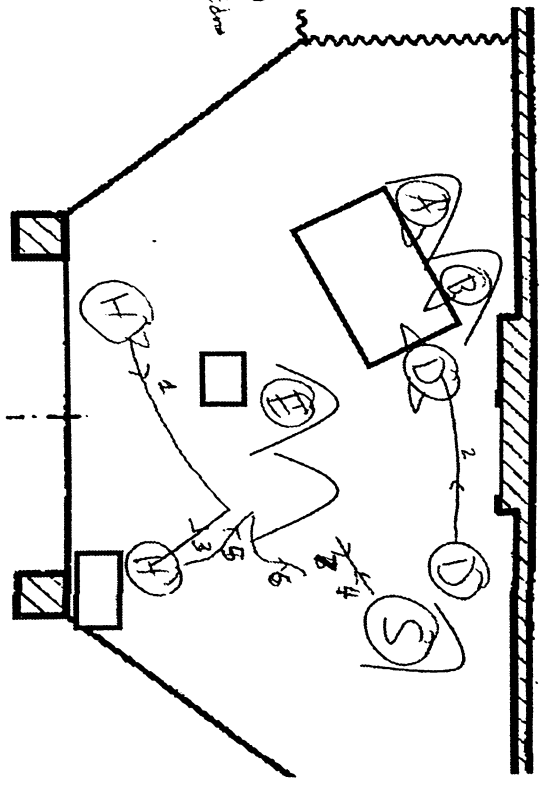
DEAN: I told you.

STUDENT: But I don't think it's fair to judge the whole human race based on such a limited sample.



③
 ②
 ①
 100% sucko
 lousy
 reception
 is perfect!

HARVEY: Hey, take a little responsibility for you own actions, why don't you?
 EDNA: We're going to Hell, I know it.
 HARVEY: He said we could say what we want.
 EDNA: *[Whispering to HARVEY]* Yes, but we don't know if he's going to be loving and forgiving or righteous and vindictive.
 STUDENT: Why do you insist upon giving me human qualities? It's quite a projection.
 HARVEY: Hey, you created us.
 STUDENT: But I gave you free will!
 HARVEY: That's it. Pass the buck.
 STUDENT: I am not passing the buck.
 HARVEY: You and your "free will." What good is it, huh? I exert my free-will all over the place, and all it does is get me thrown out of bars.
 STUDENT: You don't understand the concept. I gave you choices—
 HARVEY: Yeah, like being able to vote for a president and then making all the candidates jerks?
 STUDENT: There's more to it than that.
 HARVEY: Hey, if I really had free will, do you think this is the life I would have free-willed.
 STUDENT: Maybe it is!
 HARVEY: Yeah, well, let me tell you, if you designed me so that I'd make the free will choice of *this* life, then you're *really* sick
 EDNA: Harvey!
 STUDENT: You could have made better choices.
 HARVEY: I can't afford better choices! My credit cards are already up to the limit!
 DEAN: Excuse me—
 EDNA: Harvey.
 HARVEY: It's like everything that's great about life, he's supposed to get credit for, and everything that's lousy is supposed to be our fault. Well, it's not fair!
 EDNA: Harvey, please.
 HARVEY: It's just not fair!
 DEAN: Excuse me!... I'm sorry but our time is almost over.
 PROFESSOR B: If I may, I have one final question.
 DEAN: Go ahead, Professor



PROFESSOR B: Is it difficult?

HARVEY: You bet it is

EDNA: you never feel like you have enough brains.

HARVEY: And you're always getting these impulses- these urges -- that make no sense whatsoever.

EDNA: Your kids look to you for answers, and you can't think of anything. So you end up giving them the same stupid answers your parents gave you.

HARVEY: When I think there are people dumber than I am, I get scared
[To STUDENT] So why'd you do it?

STUDENT: Do what?

HARVEY: Why'd you make us so messed up?

STUDENT: You're missing the point! I didn't create the human being so that each one would work perfectly. I created the human being so that humanity as a whole would work perfectly!

HARVEY: But humanity as a whole doesn't work perfectly!

EDNA: It doesn't work perfectly at all. And we have it better than most people.

DEAN: Do you?

EDNA: Oh, yes. Most people, if they get through childhood without dying of hunger or disease, all they got left is a life of misery, pain and injustice.

STUDENT: But I gave human beings all the resources they need. Why, I've given you the ingredients for paradise.

EDNA: Ohh... You're a real tease, you know that?

STUDENT: What do you mean?

EDNA: You made the world so wonderful, and our lives so difficult. I mean, maybe we're not the best examples of human beings, but, well, we're trying as hard as we can, and, and, and we want to be decent people and we want our kids to turn out right and we want to have happy lives, and, and, we're trying so hard, but... *[breaks into tears]* You know what it's like to know you're doing your best and that your life still stinks?

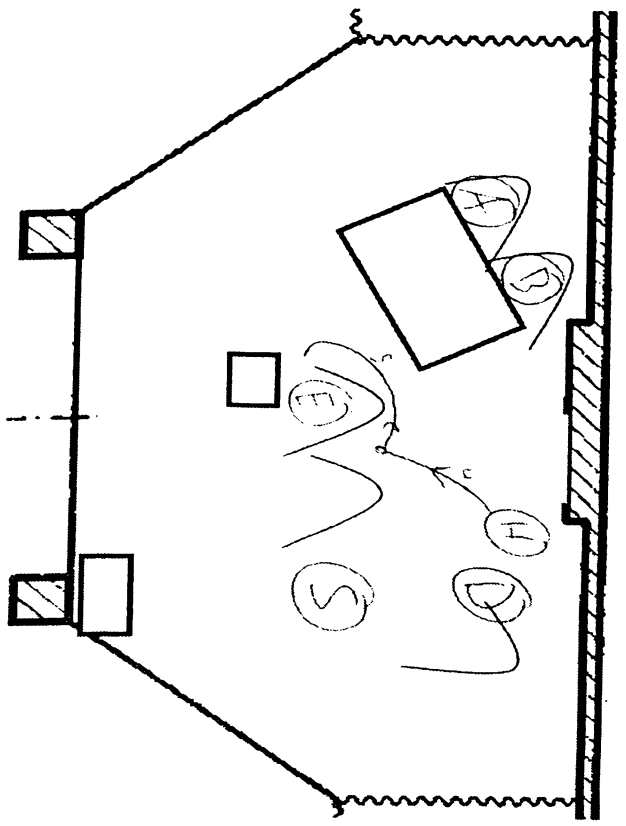
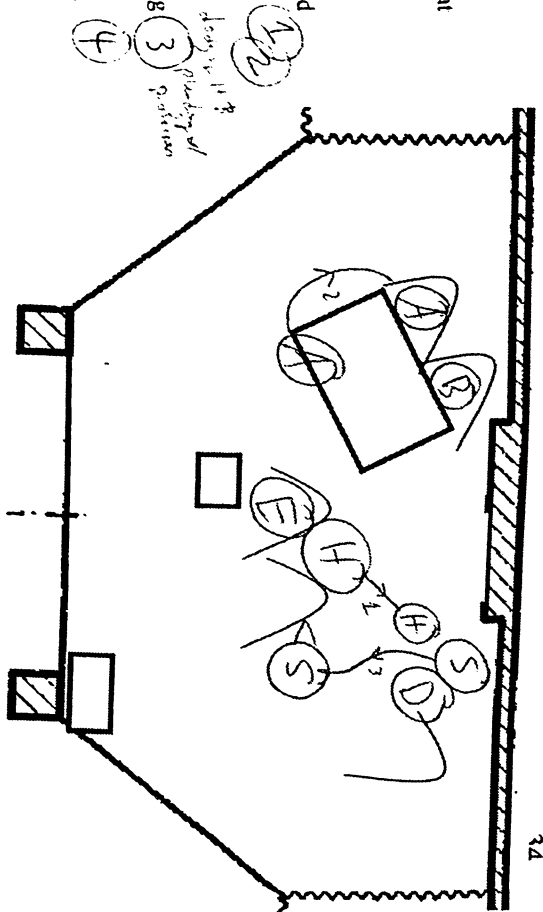
HARVEY: *[to THE STUDENT]* Good work, buddy. *[Comforting]*

EDNA: Hey, come on Don't cry. You do okay.

EDNA: I do not

HARVEY: You do, too. You're a good mother, you're a good wife, and you're one of the best damn directory assistance operators in Dayton.

EDNA: You really think so?



HARVEY: Hey, as far as I'm concerned, anyone who needs a phone number and who calls you is a lucky man.

EDNA: Thanks.

HARVEY: And if our kids turn out okay—

EDNA: If?

HARVEY: And when our kids turn out okay, it'll be all because of you.

EDNA: Well, you had a lot to do with—

HARVEY: I hope they don't end up like me at all. That's my hope for the future.

DEAN: I think we're ready to decide your grade.

STUDENT: But all humans aren't like this. If only you had met John and Mary.

HARVEY: Of course. Show off a couple of bozos you've made life easy for.

STUDENT: I gave them the exact same universe I gave you.

HARVEY: You sound just like my dad sometimes, you know that?

STUDENT: *(to PROFESSORS)* John and Mary have done so much with their lives.

HARVEY: John's the biggest kiss-ass in Dayton.

STUDENT: He is not!

HARVEY: Oh, yes he is. Even when he goes to church, it's not to pray. He just wants to suck up to you.

PROFESSOR A: I see.

HARVEY: And Mary's worse.

PROFESSOR B: Is she, Edna?

EDNA: Do I have to be honest?

DEAN: We'd appreciate it

EDNA: Well then, Mary--who, for the record, no longer has the nose you gave her. I mean, she may spend all day curing people, but have you ever tried to just sit down and have a nice conversation with her? I healed so many people today. Edna. Of course, not as many you gave phone numbers to.

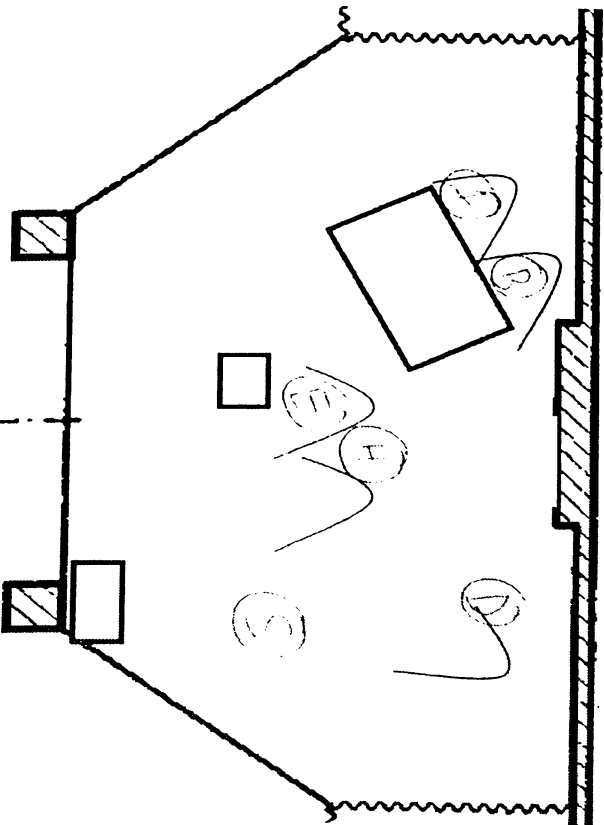
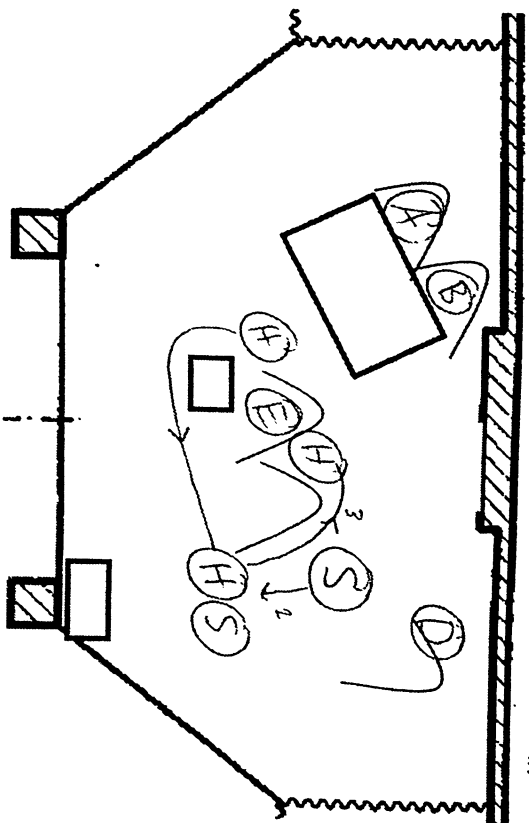
HARVEY: They're great human beings, all right. I'm sure they would have given you all the answers you wanted.

EDNA: An for the rest of our lives, they would have bored us at dinner parties saying, "We helped the Almighty get an A."

STUDENT: Can I just say one thing on my behalf?

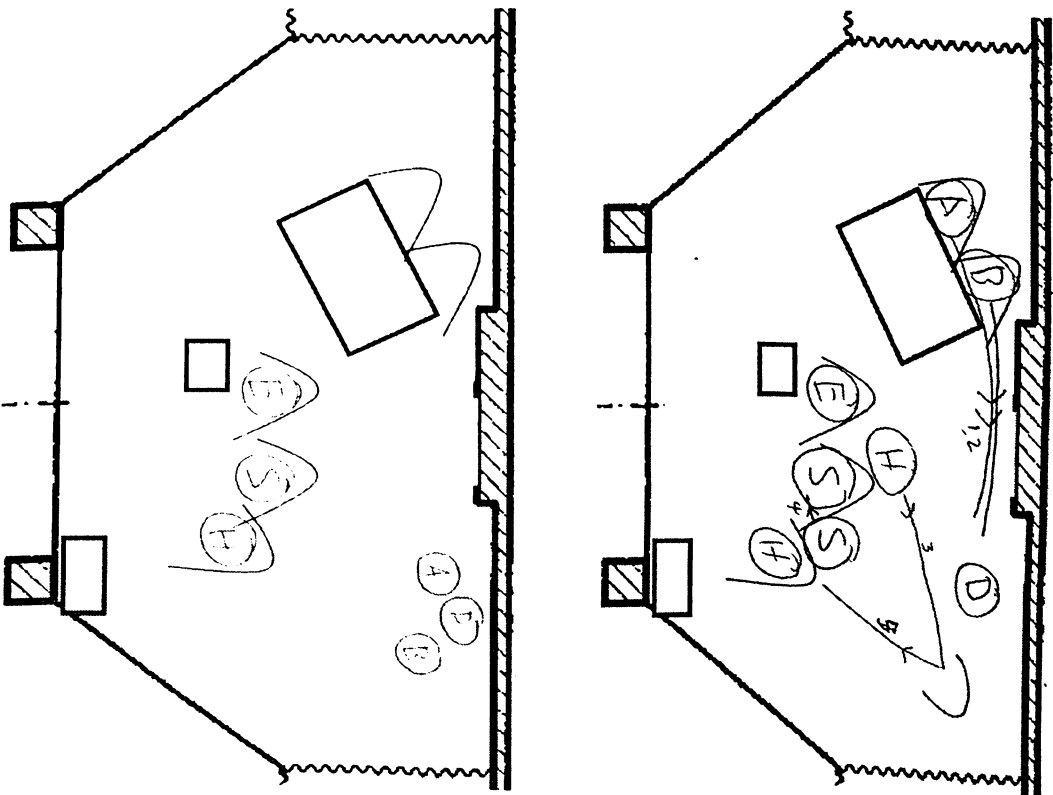
DEAN: Go ahead. This is your chance

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HARVEY: Yeah, go ahead.
EDNA: Yeah.
PROFESSOR B: Please.
PROFESSOR A: We're listening. They looked so good on paper.
STUDENT: I... Um... [sighs then] They looked so good on paper.
DEAN: Thank you, we'll caucus now to decide your final grade.
[The teachers gather together and start to whisper. We occasionally hear some arguing tones.]
EDNA: They decide right on the spot?
STUDENT: Yes.
HARVEY: What degree are you going for, anyway?
STUDENT: My M.U.
HARVEY: M.U.?
STUDENT: Master of the Universe.
[We hear some heated mumbling.]
PROFESSOR B: You have to consider the exquisite beauty of their design.
PROFESSOR A: But they're not practical.
HARVEY: *[To THE STUDENT]* Can I ask you a question about the universe that has troubled me since I was a kid?
STUDENT: Sure.
HARVEY: How come there's maple walnut ice cream and butter pecan ice cream, instead of maple pecan and butter walnut?
STUDENT: I don't think I can answer that one.
HARVEY: Nobody can.
DEAN: Despite all their flaws, they have survived for thousands and thousands of years.
PROFESSOR B: And they have such nice feet.
PROFESSOR A: Their feet are indeed nice. It's from the ankles up that they make me nervous.
PROFESSOR B: Still, their genetic engineering is most advanced.
DEAN: And they're also biodegradable.
HARVEY: *[to EDNA]* This is going to make some story to tell our friends.
STUDENT: Oh, I'm afraid once you're teleported back to Earth, you won't remember a thing.
HARVEY: *[to EDNA]* Oh, well. There goes the movie sale.

Handwritten scribbles and initials: "US", "12B", and other illegible marks.



EDNA: And I had already decided what I was going to wear on the talk shows.

HARVEY: Let's face it. We're going to have to spend the rest of our lives as average people.

EDNA: [softly] Damn.

DEAN: Yes, yes, yes. There is much wrong with the project. I still don't think it's fair to call the student an underachiever.

PROFESSOR A: I don't know why he created them; they serve no useful purpose.

PROFESSOR B: Maybe they're not perfect, but there is something so beautiful and special about them.

EDNA: [to THE STUDENT] Is it, is it okay if I take off my slippers?

STUDENT: Go right ahead.

EDNA: Thanks

[EDNA takes off her slippers and rubs her feet. Without STUDENT noticing, this gets PROFESSOR B's attention]

HARVEY: Your bunions acting up again?

EDNA: [Defensive] Yes.

HARVEY: You gotta stop buying those teeny shoes. You don't got teeny feet.

EDNA: I buy shoes the right size

HARVEY: No, you don't. You keep insisting your feet are smaller than they are. That's why your feet are always in such lousy shape.

[PROFESSOR B walks over to EDNA and examines her foot]

PROFESSOR B: I'm changing my grade

[PROFESSOR B returns to the other teachers]

EDNA: What did I do?

STUDENT: Nothing

[THE TEACHERS and the conferees]

DEAN: We've decided your grade

[THE TEACHERS resume their previous positions. THE STUDENT and THE TEACHERS face them]

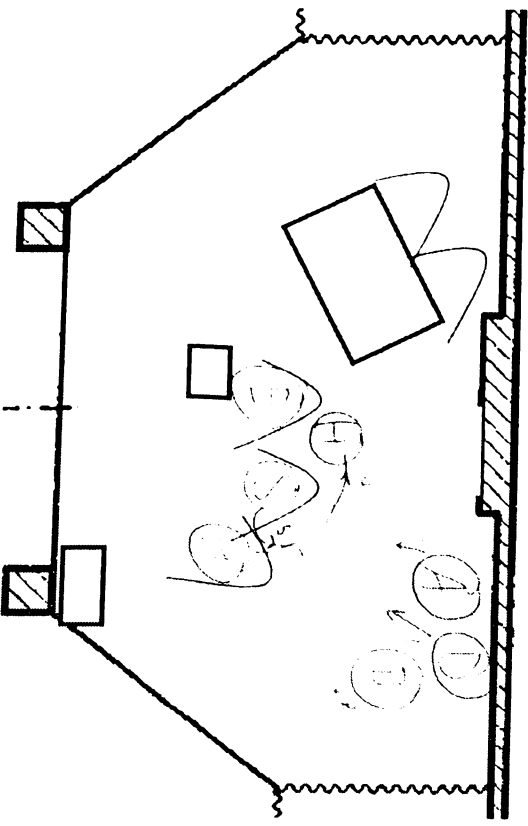
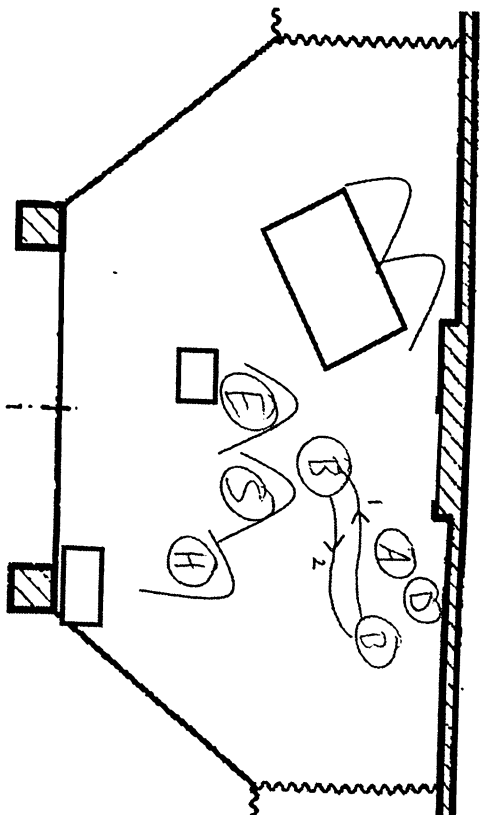
DEAN: [cont'd] There is much that is commendable about your project, both in Earth's evolutionary ability and its astonishing variety of beauty. The human being is wondrous and fascinating

Nevertheless...

HARVEY: [to EDNA] Uh, oh

EDNA: Sibh

1



DEAN: The three of us agree that the human being's design is tragically flawed. Look at them. They're so scared and confused by their own drives. What good are all their noble qualities when by adulthood, most of them have developed a grudge against life itself? I'm afraid we're going to have to give you a C plus.

STUDENT: C plus?!!!

EDNA and HARVEY: [Simultaneously] C plus?!!!

DEAN: I'm sorry.

HARVEY: Wait a second. We do not live in a C plus universe.

EDNA: It's at least a B.

STUDENT: I created fruits and vegetables and birds that fly and fish that swim and artists and athletes and thinkers and leaders, and all I get is a C plus? I gave this project everything I had.

Everything!

PROFESSOR A: Some of us felt the grade was generous.

HARVEY: [to the PROFESSORS] All I can say is— it's easy to sit back and judge. Real easy. How do you guys know you're not just somebody else's science project? Huh? Huh? I bet right now some higher being is giving your entire dimension a D.

PROFESSOR B: I don't understand. After all of your complaints HARVEY: So I was in a bad mood! You got us at a bad time.

EDNA: It was just before bedtime.

HARVEY: And on Saturday night, if you get my drift.

EDNA: those six minutes mean a lot to us.

HARVEY: [to EDNA, surprised] They do?

EDNA: You know they do

HARVEY: Well, I sorta hoped, but uh, I never assumed...

EDNA: Well, of course

HARVEY: I keep worrying one day they'd come up with a silicon chip

EDNA: No. Never

PROFESSOR A: [getting ready to go] I don't see why they go on

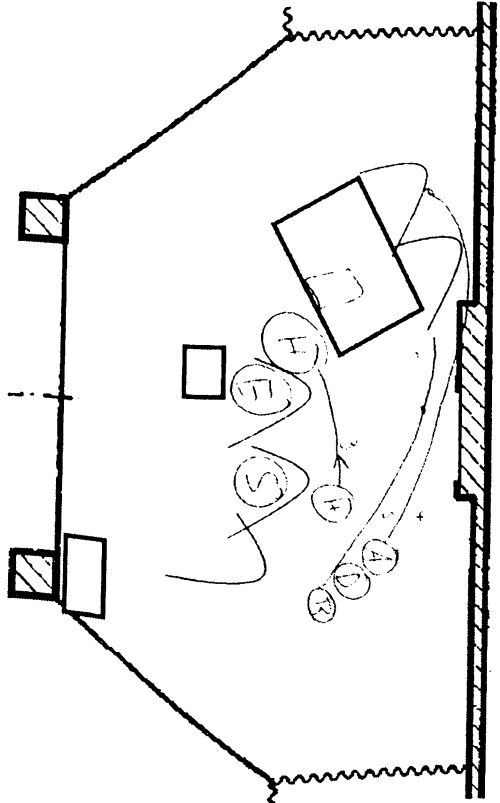
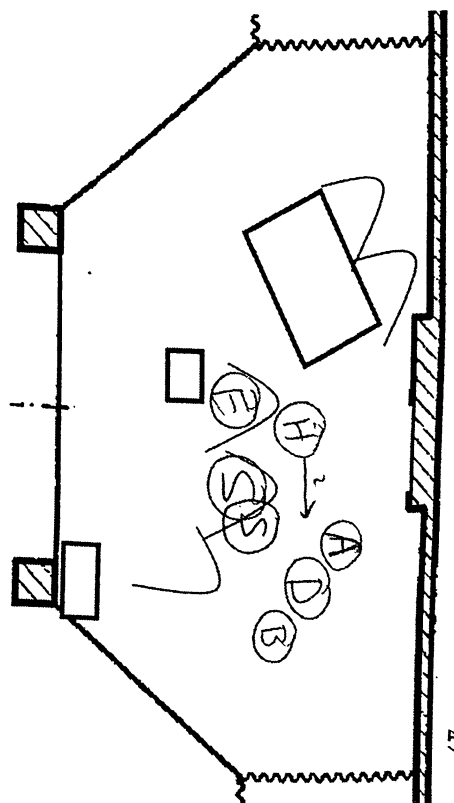
EDNA: [faded] I really don't

DEAN: Why?

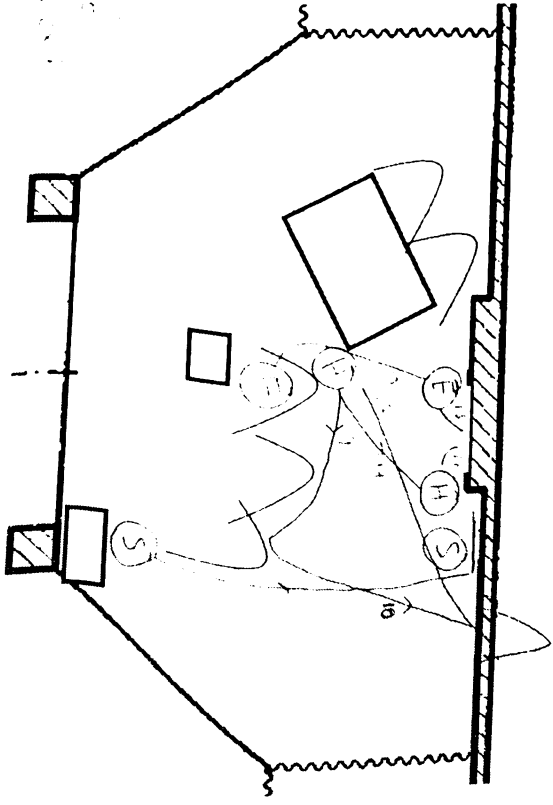
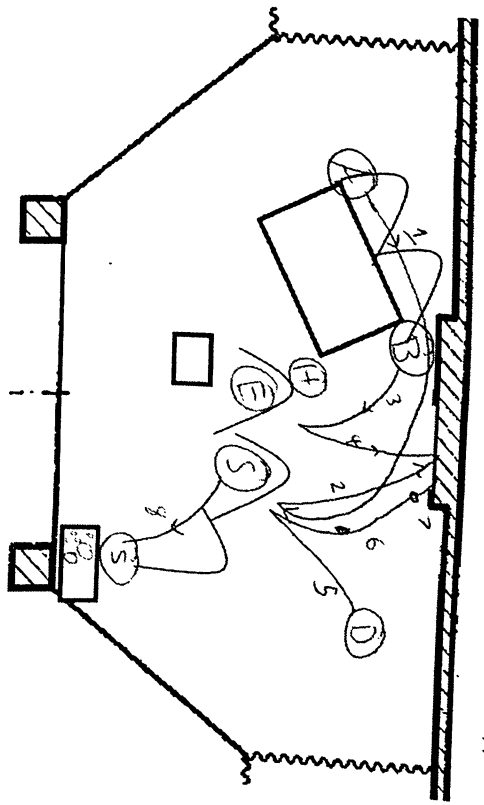
EDNA: [Straining hard to think of a reply.] Well... Because... [Suddenly inspired]

HARVEY: That's right. Things could always get better.

PROFESSOR B: And what makes you think that?



HARVEY: [to EDNA] Tell 'em
EDNA: I haven't the slightest idea. I guess we were just designed that way. When push comes to shove, I guess we were designed to have...faith.
[Everyone looks at THE STUDENT. He smiles and nods.]
HARVEY: [to THE PROFESSORS] See? He's not as big a jerk as you think he is.
DEAN: I'm sorry. The grade is final.
PROFESSOR A: [to THE STUDENT] You want my advice? Next time, don't design them in your own image. It's very narcissistic.
[PROFESSOR A exits]
PROFESSOR B: [to THE HUMANS] Take care of your feet, and always treat cows with respect.
[PROFESSOR B exits]
DEAN: [to THE STUDENT] now don't be too hard on yourself. You did your best.
STUDENT: That makes it even more depressing.
DEAN: It's only a universe. It'll pass.
[THE DEAN exits. THE STUDENT starts to clean up.]
EDNA: Uh...I'm sorry if we blew your grade.
STUDENT: It's my fault. I should've never goofed off on the seventh day.
EDNA: Well, if it means anything, we *are* glad you created us.
STUDENT: Are you? Are you, Harvey?
HARVEY: Well, all in all, when I think about it, I mean, life's not that bad, once you get over the disappointment that it stinks.
STUDENT: I'll remember that.
HARVEY: So you want to grab a brew?
STUDENT: Better have you teleported back to Earth.
HARVEY: Oh, yeah, well, sure.
EDNA: By the way, if there is such a thing as reincarnation.
STUDENT: I really can't discuss such things.
EDNA: You don't have to tell me, but if it does exist, could you bring me back as a bunny rabbit?
HARVEY: And could you bring me back as an eagle?
EDNA: An eagle?
HARVEY: Yeah. Just once. I'd like to fly real high on my own power, real high, so I could look down and get a clear view of the whole shebang.
STUDENT: That's a very nice desire, Harvey.



Bibliography:

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